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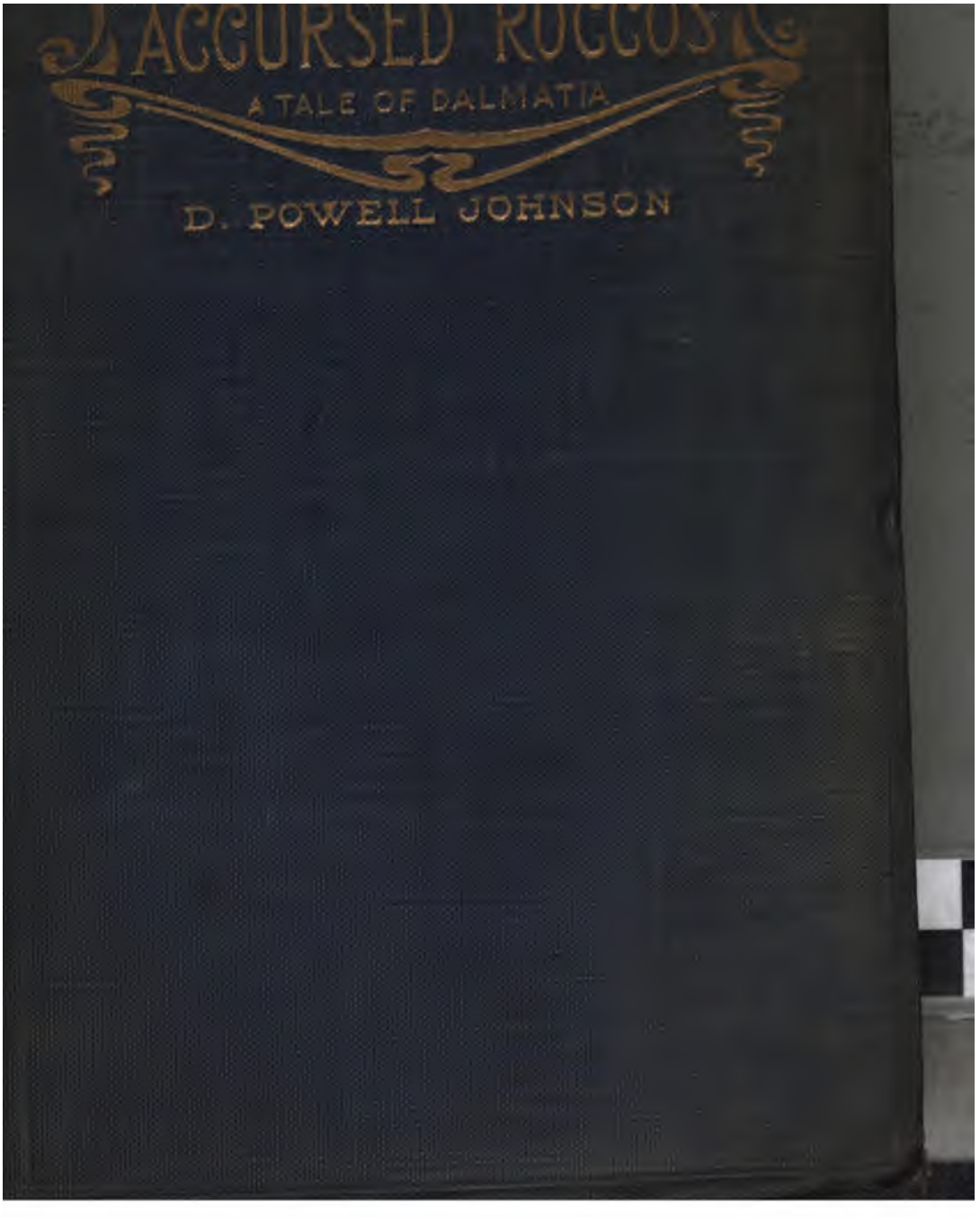
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ACCURSED ROCCOS
A TALE OF DALMATIA
D. POWELL JOHNSON


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THE ACCURSÉD ROCCOS

A Tale of Dalmatia

By D. POWELL JOHNSON



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1918



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The Accurséd Roccos

PART I

CHAPTER I

MY only pleasant memory of Brindisi is that I found McClellan there—one hot June day, when, on walking into the hotel lounge after breakfast, I saw his big wiry frame and long legs stretched out upon an easy chair.

As boys we had by no means been friends, having had, on an average, one battle a week after school let out; but both had always fought fair—had never bit, scratched, kicked, butted, or struck below the belt except by accident, so there was no reason, after a separation of more than ten years, why the old doubtful relations should not at once be replaced by new and much better ones.

As violinist, Harry had been far advanced at twelve years of age. Since then he had studied abroad. For the four years last past it seemed that he had quarreled with his last and equally irascible teacher, a great, Belgian violinist, spending the three warm months in travel. A couple of months before our meeting the Professor had chased him out of the house with a poker and Harry had bidden adieu by "heaving" a stone through the win-

dow. This row seemed to have been final. Now, after his summer outing he was planning to go to Vienna and quarrel with another great teacher there. Formerly Harry had been much given to jibes and scoffing, the which had led to most of our battles, though I admit that the pet name "carrot-top" was sometimes responsible. As a man, the above characteristic had changed into a keen raillery and biting sarcasm which, I was sure, would not always spare his friends. However, I remembered again that, as a boy, he had always fought fair. I made up my mind that he would fight fair now; for as men, we are never much deceived in other men whom we knew as boys. In any case, I congratulated myself that we would, thereafter, be in the same city, for I had already resided a year in Vienna.

There was a third member of our party. That was Herr Ober-Leutnant Overmann of the Austrian Army,—of the Ingenieurs, and it had been through his eloquence and urging that Harry and I had decided to cross over and visit Dalmatia and Montenegro, on our way to Vienna. I had had a slight previous acquaintance with the Ober-Leutnant in Vienna and knowing beforehand that he would be in Naples I had hunted him up there. We had come over to Brindisi together. Harry's keenness in reading his fellows was shown at once, when, upon being introduced, he had asked the Ingenieur "How many wives" he had. The Ingenieur had been attached, recently, to the Austrian garrison in Trebinje where he was to have special work which would occupy his time for several years. But he was already no stranger to Dalmatia. The Ingenieur spoke English almost without accent, and seldom made a mistake of any account.

"But I hear you cannot get anything to eat over there," objected Harry.

"Of course," answered the Ingeneur, "all is very primitive in Dalmatia. Except in Ragusa there are no palatial hotels, no pâte de foie gras, or broiled live lobsters. But if you be a good traveler you do not mind such things as that any more than you mind going under the pump to wash. On the other hand Dalmatia has much that must interest any intelligent person, because it, especially in the south, has stood still;—is of yesterday, not of to-day. It does not matter much, whether one be set down in London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, or any other city. In the latter day striving for luxury and modernity they have grown to be alike, and changing your city is largely a mere change of hotel and scarcely worth the trouble, and what one says of those large centers is equally true of the popular Meccas of lesser size throughout Europe. Most of them are false, hollow and ridiculous.

But you will not find Dalmatia modern. Here you will find what you are looking for; local customs and superstitions, dress and ceremonies which date even from Roman days. You will like Dalmatia because it is something else than Europe with its Swiss hotels, pusillanimous thieving hotel and waiter class, society of ephimerides and demimondaines with their cavaliers, and mob who pay to stare and be stared at, and"——

Harry interrupted, with a drawl:

"I say, Herr Ober-Leutnant, have you bought stock in a Dalmatian vineyard?"

"And," continued the Ingenieur to me, without taking notice of the interruption, "in Dalmatia and Montenegro you will not find people who attempt to dress like the Crown Prince and his dame on

one hundred crowns a month, but people who wear a costume which their ancestors wore,"——

"Their clothes cleaning establishments are more careful than in Europe itself then!" asserted Harry obstinately.

"And for holidays, at least one suit of clothes in a lifetime will suffice for them. There, instead of the liason, is still the custom of marriage, and instead of divorce, the vendetta"——

"And still you are recommending a man like my friend Ed Ransome to go there!"

"And above all, beautiful women—and strong."

"Ah! The preamble was long, but the essential statement comes at last! I see how it is, Ed! The Ingenieur is in love with a Dalmatian woman—*that's* it!"

"Never mind him, Herr Ober-Leutnant! Ever since he was very young he has had treatment for this trouble,—and in vain"——

"Treatment which you knew how to give, didn't you, Eddie?"

"Oh, it is all right," said the Ingenieur, "and he is right. Come over and I'll introduce you to her. I'll even let you take her away from me if you can. Could I offer more?"

"*That,* is decidedly a gold brick!" muttered Harry, but not loud enough for the Ingenieur to hear.

All this had occurred in the hotel lounge and there had been much more of it. Whatever else he might be the Ingenieur was a companionable fellow for a day, as Harry and I agreed over a glass of whiskey and soda just before retiring. We both agreed that he was not a man to be trusted, but that did not concern us—we did not need to trust

him. "We could enjoy him until he showed his cloven hoof and then dismiss him."

Toward evening two days later, on a tramp steamer, the Punta d'Ostro hove in sight and soon thereafter we were passing between the frowning batteries on this and the Punta d'Arza into the Bocche of Cattaro.*

We lost the Ingenieur at Castel Nuovo, our first halt after entering the outermost of the gulfs. By this time we were keenly sorry to part with him, but he solemnly promised to come down from Trebinje and see us again if he could get leave. He informed us that he would go by horseback from here to Ragusa the following morning, and then to Trebinje. Harry and I wondered why he had not gone direct to Gravosa by which he would have had a better ship and a closer connection. This, of course, was none of our business, but Harry had always been incorrigible.

As the Ingenieur's boat started away toward shore he called out:

"Herr Ober-Leutnant! Does the fair one live at Castel Nuovo?"

"One does. I'll send you letters to the others who live farther up."

"But we want to know the one who lives here."

"You'll find all that are good for you at"——

But his voice was lost for his rowers were making good time and our ship was turning her prow up one of the most beautiful land-locked sheets of water in the world. We soon partially forgot our companion for the wild land and sea-scapes, now broad water, now narrow inlet, islands, head-lands and elevations everywhere in sight dotted by church

* Pronounced Cat'taro.

or monastery, or by fortress new or old, the high points crowned by the crimson glow of the setting sun. Finally, through a very narrow pass, Le Catene, in olden times closed to the enemies' ships by chains, we entered the vestibule, so to speak, which serves for the Gulf of Risano to the north, and the Gulf of Cattaro proper, to the south. Here our eyes were greeted by the most beautiful picture we had ever seen. Upon the opposite shore lay the dead city of Perasto. On our left, not far off, the twin islets of San Giorgio and Madonna della Scalpello, the first occupied by old deserted batteries arranged upon the ruin of an ancient Benedictine monastery, the latter by a votive church the very walls of which seem washed by the waters of the gulf. Then our ship cut sharply to the south and we passed into the lovely Gulf of Cattaro itself, walled in by lofty peaks and headlands like a Norwegian fjord, dominated by the Lovçen, sacred mountain of the Montenegrins—all gray black and wild. Along the shores, upon the drift, so to speak, which seems to have fallen from the peaks above, lie the old towns, one after another and sometimes in continuous line, Drahava, Marovich, Dobrota;—Donji Stolivo, Perzagno, Mula, sad monuments of a past magnificence, the immense size of some of whose houses bespeak the memory of the traveler for those who once footed it there in silks and satin and who made their last bow to us with the passing of the galley and the high-sterned Venetian ships-of-sail. All of the houses are of "Bocchesan" style, few dating from less than a century ago and many much more, and the loop holes and other arrangements for defence which distinguish many are silent witnesses of the less quiet and secure times back to which these old

structures can look. To-day very many of them are tenanted by memories only.

Night was falling as we reached the town of Cattaro and disembarked upon the Riva. A motley chattering assemblage was taking an evening promenade outside the town walls. We were destined to make better acquaintance with some of them than we were expecting to do, as we followed our baggage through the Marine gate, through the narrow and populous streets, to the primitive little inn.

CHAPTER II

We had decided to begin our sight-seeing at Perasto, so accordingly, after breakfast the following brilliant sunny morning, having bargained by means of Harry's Italian with the first boatman who offered, we were early on our way to the dead city, being conveyed in a "barque" propelled by two rowers who stood up, facing forward, and pushed on the oars.

The Ingenieur had said that Perasto contained some four hundred and fifty houses of which more than three hundred were uninhabited and mostly ownerless—to be had for the mere taking possession, provided any one wished to own a ruin. A little way off it looked like a beautiful marble city with many varieties of architectural frontage and ornamentation, the little cathedral with its handsome Byzantine bell-tower dominating all. It was only after our boat floated alongside of a short dilapidated stone pier which many a dainty velvet clad foot had trod in days of yore that we realized that Perasto was indeed of the past. Her ruins greeted the eye in almost every frontage in every direction—and so silent was she, that our own voices would startle us.

I shall not burden the reader with an account of the romantic houses and spots over which Harry and I spent many warm but happy hours that day. Instead I shall turn to my story itself, and with as little digression as possible, endeavor to make to my reader the first mention of a certain curious character of the dead Venetian past, in, as nearly as

I can remember, the same manner by which it was made to us.

This mention occurred in the course of a conversation with the priest of San Nicolo. We had at last found him at four o'clock, and with him we visited his church and sacristy. The day had been exceedingly hot, the sacristy was cool, and the Riverenci, who spoke both Italian and German, had proven to be a most interesting personality, knowing, as he did, all there was on record of the Bocche from the time of Queen Teuta to the present day. After reciting the many vicissitudes endured by Perasto through conquest, piracy, feuds and earthquakes, he finally told us of the last days of the Venetian Republic and of the ceremonious burial under the high altar of his church of the standard which had been confided to Perasto by the Doge.

"And with the burial of the gonfalon was interred the life and prosperity of Perasto. For not only did the city itself never again thrive, but many families buried their records and treasure during those troublous times. For, mind you, Napoleon would have burnt the Holy Virgin herself for gold, to say nothing of her images, and the later Austrians also allowed little to filter through their fingers. Well, as many a family was wholly wiped out in the course of the next twenty-five years, many records and treasures have remained buried and forgotten."

"Why did these people not apply to the Church for protection?" asked Harry, after some further conversation.

"The Church herself needed protection in those days. However, some did apply,—and that question recalls a story."

In obedience to his beckon we followed him into the church. He resumed.

"Please notice yonder slab in the pavement—there in the light."

We walked over to it. It was an ancient gravestone and the letters were only partly decipherable.

"It is much worn and injured but you can still read, 'here lies Pietro Rocco, mariner and merchant, ——— by the Grace of God —— may he rest in peace.' His body no longer rests here as his daughter, many years later, removed his bones to Curzola."

"This date seems to have been 1759. Am I right?" asked Harry.

"I think so, Signor. That was, of course, the date of his burial, since it could not have been that of his birth. He was the last in the direct male line, of the accurséd Roccos"——

"The *accurséd* Roccos?"

"Yes, they were so called. We do not know for certain why, but I have some reason to suppose that Rocco's Secretarian ancestor was one of the six Perasto conspirators who in 1535 murdered the Abbot of San Giorgio while he was celebrating mass, and at the moment of consecration. These conspirators and their families were cursed,—how or by whom, we have no record, but they all in the direct line died out through illness or lack of heirs. The Rocco who lay here was the very last male scion of them all. Are you tired of the tale, Signori? No? You are very polite! Well, I will continue:

The date here given on the gravestone was of course many years before the fall of the Republic, but like many another man, Rocco's descendants lived after him. Not much is known now of the

intimate history of the family, but we do know a little. First of all, do not forget that Pietro Rocco was, supposedly, a fabulously rich man. He was a resident of Perzagno and had two houses over there. He had no sons, and thus his name ended with him; but had three daughters, his favorite being the second one, Albina. These daughters always quarreled bitterly, it seems, with one another and with their father. Just why, we no longer know, but we believe their infelicity to have been a part of the curse. The eldest and youngest were devout followers of the Church, and in time took up their residence in a convent somewhere on the gulfs and entered the novitiate. Rocco himself, no doubt, really an ex-pirate, was bitterly enraged at this and gathering together a band of the haidukans, remnants of which still existed on the gulfs, he broke into the convent, removed his daughters, and imprisoned them in some place or other of his own selection. But for this sacrilegious act he received a prompt retribution from his Maker.

One of these haidukans seems to have been an expert musician and an equally expert squire of dames. We have no record of how the matter came about, but Rocco's favorite daughter Albina, in due time after this event, was found to be with child, and Rocco soon identified his daughter's cavalier in the person of the haidukan in question. We know from an old letter that about this time Rocco lay in his bed badly wounded, and that the haidukans held an impressive funeral ceremony over their gay member. This event no doubt still further embittered the relations between the daughters and between them and their father.

There was further trouble between Rocco and the band of haidukans, but from now on the record

of the family is unknown until about the time of Rocco's death, save that the offending daughter was later married and widowed, and that her illegitimate son grew to manhood, though not in his grandfather's house.

The last knowledge that we have of Rocco himself, is that rendered desperate by the constant quarrels and bickerings of his daughters, he built a peculiar house and swore that they should live in it for the rest of their lives. This house still stands, and if you will search between the north end of Perzagno and the beginning of Stolivo you will readily find it. It is known as Le Tre Sorelle. It is built together, but in three separate divisions which formerly had no communication with each other, and Rocco intended each division for a daughter."

"Curious! And did the sisters live there?"

"I do not know from any record, but they no doubt did, as in those days the word of the master of the house was the household law. Albina spent her last years in Curzola, but that was long after all the rest had died."

"And what became of Rocco's great fortune?"

"That brings us to the point of my tale. No one knows what he did with it. At the time of his death he was in possession of certain very rich lands. An old will still to be read in the archives shows that these lands were left to Albina, and there was a clause that she care for her sisters during their life time. But unless, as is often the case, Rocco's wealth was greatly over-estimated, he must have lost or disposed of the most of it before his death, for the lands, though rich, scarcely counted in the estate he was supposed to have.

However, the lands were there, and in due time

Albina herself passed, leaving these lands to her illegitimate son on the condition that he bear her husband's name, which was Portulan. At the fall of the Republic this illegitimate child, then in middle life, was among those who claimed the protection of the church, on the ground that during her later life his mother had been a faithful member of our Communion. This was, of course, true, and it had been on this ground that her father's interment had been allowed here."

"Are any of their descendants still living?"

"Oh, yes. The present possessor of these very lands is a rich wine-grower who lives over in Perzagno. He has a young daughter and a niece. The niece is in the paternal line and is the heiress to old Rocco's lands. If you ever meet them they doubtless can tell you more of Albina Portulan than I can, as they must have many a letter and document to which I have no access, of course. They are Oriental heretics, now."

"Ah, I see! Then this niece's name is Portulan."

"Yes, since that was Albina's name by marriage."

"A fascinating tale, Ed! It has the advantage over many other old stories, in that it is continued down to the present in the persons of living witnesses, so to speak."

"What were the sisters like in their personal appearance?" I asked.

"We have no record as to that," answered the priest. "We only know that the family was Venetian, of Secretarian* rank and not mixed with the Slavs. I am sorry I cannot tell you more of them."

*That is, the "Cittadini originarii," who ranked next to the Patricians and equal with the nobility of the mainland—very like the Equestrian rank of ancient Rome.

"But, Signor, perhaps we have remained too long here. If you will come to my house I will try to find something in the way of poor refreshments for you, and if you like, will relate some other tales of the place." *

The day was going when we again reached the dilapidated pier and haled our boatmen out of a neighboring wine room. It had been intensely hot but the evening was cool and we prepared to spend two lazy luxurious hours under bright stars.

But a few minutes after starting we were treated to a beautiful surprise. One by one the numberless little towns around the gulf sprang into illumination, and before every town one or more beach fires were lighted.† On questioning the boatmen we learned that this was St. John's day and that this illumination was usual each year. Moreover, before every house wherein resided any one named "John" a beach fire would be lighted. We had noticed these collections during the day as we had rowed past several places, but I had taken them to be mere wood piles, and the fact that this was St. John's day had either escaped mention in our hearing or had received but a passing notice. Therefore this display was a complete surprise. "John"—"Johan," "Jovani"—"Giovanni" is a very common name in nearly every language, so the beach fires were many and soon the shores of the gulf looked like a vast rosary, each bead springing into flame as it was counted. In the other houses candles and lamps burned in the windows and in every little

* Since the date of this conversation the old church has been "restored" and Rocco's grave-stone has disappeared.

† The adaptation to Christian purposes of the ancient pagan custom of lighting fires at the summer solstice.

coffee-house was a crowd of merry-makers whose jests and laughter came floating out to us as we rowed along.

As we came to Dobrota the illumination and beach fires seemed to be especially important and we requested our rowers to cut in and pass as near by as possible, with the result that we were soon within almost leaping distance of the ends of the short stone piers as we passed. Here in one quarter near a tiny chapel on a rocky point and a votive cross upon a rock in the water, was a vast fire located in front of a very large old time house, which itself was brilliantly lit up from ground floor to garret. A large gathering of people extended from this house to the beach fire and a large number of barques lay moored there. As we came up a brilliant party left the house and came down to the boats. Our rowers said it was a wedding party, and that the groom's name must be "John." The people were gaily dressed, some in fancy local costumes and there was a sprinkling of military uniforms. All were laughing and chattering as they began to clamber into the boats by the light of the fire and of many lanterns and torches.

We were only a few yards away when the party left the house and had no difficulty in identifying the bridal pair in the persons of a trim little girl in flowing veils and a big dark-browed man in evening clothes. I had just time to notice them when I almost fell out of the boat in my surprise, and at almost the same instant Harry seized my arm. He said something but I did not hear it.

Just behind the bridal couple was the rest of the bridal party awaiting its turn to embark, and all in the full light of the fire. Among these latter ones stood a young girl bearing the loveliest of all

the beautiful faces it had ever been my lot to look upon. She seemed to be of more serious cast than the merry-makers who surrounded her for she only smiled when the others bent double with laughter, and spoke when the others chattered. Pride and dignity were discernible in the face, which nevertheless could smile sweetly, and a certain sadness seemed evident in eyes which at the same time were bright and inviting. I wondred why the sadness was there and began forthwith to be jealous of the cause, and with this found myself bending so far over the side of the barque that a rough word of warning and Harry's pull upon my arm came none too soon to avoid an involuntary and embarrassing dip into the gulf. I suppose this rescue caused some clatter in our boat for several of the party were now observing us. We were pointed out to the bridal couple, and all leveled I know not what good-natured jests at us which our boatmen seemed able to answer, as more screams and laughter followed their sallies.

Among the others, the beautiful, sadly smiling face was also turned upon us, and with a certain eagerness, as I wished to believe. Harry had sat down behind me and she could not have seen him well. I hoped, I believed, she was looking at me; and as I watched her all the rest of the party and all things round about her became invisible in the keen intensity of interest centered upon that one beautiful face.

"Well," Harry broke in roughly, "it seems to me that we are intruding!"

"The gulf belongs to all," I answered, as I sat back in my place. He ordered the rowers to proceed, then said:

"So do the streets of a city; but even there, we

sometimes get it in the neck for staring. *Of course* nothing happens to the fellow who has *'hay-seed'* legibly written all over him—any more than to any other man who is known to be *not quite right.*"

"There is no hay on you, Harry. It all took fire from that poll of yours and burnt, years ago. Besides I do not believe we were intruding upon that good-natured happy company."

"I understand these people better than you do, Ed. They are partly Servian, but they are also partly Italian. And you must remember that we only know the Ingenieur a little. He plainly meant to get rid of us by leaving the ship at Castel Nuovo. We must, therefore, respect his incognito now until he chooses to hunt us up again."

"The Ingenieur! What has he to do with this?"

Harry turned on me.

"He was there in the wedding party. Were you not staring at him?"

"The Ingenieur there! Great Scott! I didn't even see him!"

"Why were you staring so then with your eyes hanging out on your cheeks, and a mouth open like a pumpkin face? Do you know that I saved you from a dip?"

But I couldn't mention the sweet face I had seen, to Harry, just yet. Of course he would have to know about her because I had made up my mind I would see her once more, at least. But I needed a little time to collect my scattered wits before I would feel prepared to endure Harry's gibes.

The Ingenieur! What was *he* doing there? Had he been with the girl? I was both glad and sorry I had not seen him; I was consumed with envy—already filled with jealousy that he should know her, as must be the case. Was *she* one of his "fair

ones who lived farther up the gulf?" The thought was like vitriol poured upon a fresh wound.

I had planned not to mention her until we should be calmly installed at a table in the cool coffee house we had visited the previous evening on the Riva, but it was very difficult to keep silence. I wondered if Harry had noticed her. Perhaps he had and was now thinking the same things I was. This also was maddening. I ventured a question.

"Did you notice that lovely girl in the bridal party? With the older couple, just behind the groom?"

"I do not specially remember any one of them," he answered indifferently. "There were several beautiful women in that party. The bride herself was no slouch. Why! Where you staring at some of those ladies in that way? This is worse yet! If you continue to do *that* sort of thing among *these* people I can see *your* finish. A dark night—and a prone figure with a small but effective three-cornered hole in its back!"

"Dramatic description was never your strong point, Harry. You become trite at once. Stick to gibing."

"And all because of some little skirted dago with just a pair of eyes and a pair of ideas in her head!"

I did not mind this particularly. If Harry had seen her he could never have characterized her thus. I saw that the coast was clear as far as my friend was concerned, and found some comfort in the fact.

After a jolly row with our boatmen in which Harry won by a good length we proceeded to install ourselves at a table in the garden of the Café Dojmi in the midst of a motley company—Italians, Italo-Servians, pure Servians, Montenegrins (the latter in their national costumes but without their

arsenals of weapons, since they are obliged to give up these upon entering the city gates), some Turks, a couple of Greeks, an Orthodox Oriental priest in his tall cylindrical hat, and a sprinkling of Austrian soldiers and smart officers, the latter in their singular military chapeaus the *real* "stove-pipe hat,"—and all doing as we were,—discussing black coffee and cognac with the eternal cigarette, or cold meat, salami, spiced fish and bottled beer.

The previous evening after having had our dinner at the hotel we had come to the Dojmi for awhile and had found a waiter who had been in America and who could speak English tolerably. At once he had become our devoted slave. Tonight I soon spied and beckoned him over.

"Enrico, I am going to give you a commission—something to do for me; but it is very, very private, and you must never say anything about it to any one now or hereafter. If you succeed, you get good pay."

"Alla right, Dottor. You shalla have not to complain ofa my tongue."

I told him of the wedding party at Dobrota, explained that I wanted him to find out who the bridal couple were and who were with them, and as much elese as he could without attracting notice. I thought best not to mention the young woman herself, trusting that the information I sought would come with the rest.

Enrico said he had a friend in Dobrota who would know all about the wedding, and that he would go over and see this friend early in the morning before his duties began. If I would come to the coffee-house next morning he would tell me what he was able to learn.

"All right, Enrico. But remember not to mention me or my friend."

"I will nota forget."

Harry regarded me with astonishment during these arrangements. After Enrico had gone he stared at me and smoked in silence. Finally he said:

"Is it so bad as all that?"

"Oh,—I guess so."

He studied me awhile again.

"Well—well! I hardly know whether to laugh in my sleeve or in your face. You *look* like you had grown up, Ed; but I begin to have my doubts."

"If admiring a woman is a sign of immaturity, Harry, then I fear the world is filled with"——

"Oh, certainly; but *well* people are not like *this*, my son! I refuse to believe that you have fallen in love with a girl of another nation whom you have seen just once, for about one-half minute, with several yards of water between you!"

"I said nothing about having fallen in love."

"Don't get nasty! What do you name it, then?"

"I don't know if I have fallen in love. But I do know that I am determined to see that girl once more, at least, let it cost what it may, or take what time it may!"

"And if she be a married woman?"

Devil take him, this was worse than the ot thing I had thought of. Married! Her air of c nity (and I supposed the certain air of sadr mentioned would have been conclusive with H had he noticed it) lent itself somewhat to Hi last suggestion. But—well, I could only wa see.

"There—that's better. Just now you we ing quite as much like a pirate as either

rowers. And yet you tell me that Cupid and you are strangers!" (I wish I could reproduce Harry's tones!)

"I don't believe either of us knows much about love, Harry. We have lived too selfishly and"——

He held up his hand and answered in his most disagreeable style:

"Now, Eddie, if you really want to change the subject, just say so and it goes. But don't try to lead me off of it as you would a four-year-old by talking around and away from it."

I was silent. His fresh cigar seemed hard to light and he consumed much time over it. He seemed embarrassed and I wondered, for I had never noticed anything of the kind on his part before. It is wonderful how much trouble a cigar is, sometimes. In fact it was perfectly clear that Harry wanted to say something to me, and either did not quite dare, or did not quite like to do it—again, a revelation! Finally I said:

"Well, spit it out, old man!"

He raised his head and observed me a moment as one does a strange wild animal or a peculiar and incomprehensible type of depravity. Then he threw back his head and laughed loud and long, until everybody in the place was looking at us and grinning in sympathy.

"A long acquaintance, truly! I shan't worry over it. *See* her again, then! *Of course* you will be disappointed and wonder what was the matter with you. There will be *something* the matter with her—there is always something the matter with a woman. We shall laugh over it together some day."

I was in turn amused at his seriousness—and his speech.

"Harry, you can only love your fiddle—a thing made of wood and catgut."

"You forget there is hair in the bow, my boy. The remaining difference is merely wood versus flesh and is in favor of the fiddle I think."

"Well, Harry, isn't there always something the matter with a man, too?"

"There is always something the matter with everything," he doggedly answered, his face again overcast. "We have been fore-doomed to expect, and be disappointed—to be not quite able to reach any ideal. To have ever, molasses with a fly in it—a lute with a rift—a flower with one bad petal—wine with leas. Ed, if I *were* to find a perfect thing, I could never *believe* in it until it became old and worn out, and I should be still hunting some perfect thing to take its place."

Harry seemed blue, but I did not understand him well enough, yet, to meddle with his mood—we had been children when we had parted. I only ventured to give my opinion that sentient beings, themselves imperfect, might very well get used to and become satisfied with others not quite perfect; that I was not expecting perfection in the woman I was now admiring; I did not even *wish* her to be perfect. For the matter of that, Love is satisfied by the *right* thing, not by a merely perfect thing of its kind.

Harry studied me curiously as I stated these views. Finally he said:

"I honestly believe that if that girl were suddenly to appear here, and be willing, you would marry her instanter, without a moment's hesitation or inquiry!"

"I don't know, Harry. Perhaps I would."

Again he stared me up and down, the while sit-



·a thing

ny boy.
versus

ting hunched down in his ch
a sigh and seemed to give r
"You're either too shallow
Did you ever hear Caesar T

CHAPTER III

After breakfast the following morning started for Risano and left me to myself day. Needless to say that the hour appointe me in the Dojmi.

Enrico joined me very soon. I made hide my impatience and told him to brin whiskey and soda. What he brought wa not whiskey, but that is a detail.

"Well, Enrico, did you find out anything

"Oh, yes. Think gotta wat you want, si

He soon informed me. Young Giovanni who lived at Donji Stolivo, had been mar St. John's evening to Militza Popovich, w lived at Dobrota. He had not been able to names of all who were there, but had a lis immediate wedding party, and the genuine this list was attested by the fact that th nieur's name was there, although wrongly The Marko Depolo and his wife on his lis probably the parents of the groom,—also the father was there.

"Enrico, why do so many of these names 'i-c-h'?"

"Most all Servian names enda thata way, It is ending for father's name for right soun

"A phonetic ending?"

"Yes, Dottor. Jovo, or Jovani, is John; fore-name. Jovano-vich is John, buta name."

"Ah! Who is Bojida Gregovich?"

"I nota know him, Dottor."

Here, then, was one married couple I could not yet identify.

"Who of these others do you know?"

"Nota many, Dottor. I coma back to Dalmatia five year ago, but I been in Spalato anda Ragusa mostly. I coma to Cattaro only before sixa month. I know mos' in Cattaro, but I nota know many outaside. I can geta my friend coma down from Dobrota?"

"We will try without him, Enrico. Tell me who of these you do know."

He went over them one by one, but my patience went to the winds.

"Enrico, one of the young women of this party was beautiful—more beautiful than I can describe. I want to know which of these names is hers."

He thought a moment.

"Marko Depolo live at Donji Stolivo and thisa party wen' thata way. In Perzagno, nota far f'om Stolivo (you can see the begin' of Perzagno over there," and he pointed across the gulf) "in Perzazagno—a beautiful girl—about her talk everybody. Famous in these parts. But I nota remember her name now."

"Well, that is something, anyway."

I felt jubilant. A well known beauty about whom everyone talked and "famous in these parts." That could mean no other than the girl I had seen, for although Dalmatia is noted for its beautiful women, I was sure there could be no two such as this one. And her name would be here among those of the unmarried girls. This was progression, and satisfactory, too.

"I cana take thisa list and aska which name it is, Dottor?"

But I did not dare risk this. She was a single

woman and well known, who lived in Perzagno and whose name was among the others of this list. I decided I would try to determine for myself which of the names was hers.

It was a warm walk out to and through the military park, but finally I reached the northwest extremity and on a narrow wooded point which jutted far out into the water, I found a comfortable bench. A troop of infantrymen was playing water foot- (or, rather, hand-) ball, and the pigskin was bounding from one sun-baked bather to another. Still another party was practising swimming in uniforms and accoutrements; but all were too far away from the lonely point to disturb me. Not far away a pretty girl was loitering about, evidently expecting to meet her swain, but she couldn't interest me now. I took out Enrico's list and spread it upon my knee. Taking a leaf from my note book I proceeded to write upon it the names of the unmarried women of the bridal party.

Amal'ya Sbut'ega,
Antoniet'ta Coloric'io,
Elvi'ra Su'jich,
Adelaid'e Dab'kovich,
Stanit'za Dab'kovich,
Lubit'za Toman'ovich,
Gizel'a* Tomanovich,
Milit'za Milat'ovich.

Eight in all, of which two pairs must be sisters.

Having written them separately, I began to try to pick her out.

I felt sure that she was pure Italian, for as far as I could remember, her face showed nothing of

* Here the name Gisela is spelled with a *s* for the sake of pronunciation; hereafter with an *s*.

the Servian type (also often very beautiful) which I was beginning to be able to recognize. For this reason I first inclined to one or other of the first two names, which were, or seemed to be, Italian. Then I remembered to have heard the names of one or two here who were clearly Italian but whose names had had the characteristic Servian terminal. Could she belong to one of the pairs of sisters? I remembered no other girl in the party who had even remotely resembled her, but that argued nothing. Sisters are often dissimilar, and once having seen her I had had eyes for no other.

As both their given names and patronymics were so clearly Servian I decided to exclude Stanitza and Militza. That left six. Sujich could not be a mixed patronymic, so I excluded Elvira. As I had cut out Stanitza, so I must put by Adelaide, her sister. That left practically three names, as the last two, being sisters, could be regarded as one.

Amalia Sbutega,
Antonietta Coloricio,
Lubitza and Gisela Tomanovich.

Surely "she" was one of these.

I dreamed over this list for some time. I was tempted to ask help of the pretty girl wandering about behind me, but remembered in time that Cattaro is a small place where every regular resident, at least, would know everybody else on the gulfs. Not that I cared a rap on my own account, of course, but I did not wish to make a bad start by having my search become the subject of gossip and laughter.

A chance memory helped me to exclude Amalia. I remembered that on the book accompanying my letter of credit, Sbutega was the banker named for Cattaro. The bridal party had certainly been com-

posed of at least well-to-do people, and while there might be other Sbutegas round about the gulfs there was probably not another wealthy Sbutega. Amalia had probably crossed the lake and stayed with friends that night. Had the banker's daughter been my beauty Enrico would have known her name.

The riddle was now reduced to the lowest terms. I now had merely to ask if the prettiest girl on the gulfs had a sister. But, in very sight of her town and perhaps of the very house in which she lived, it was hard to have to wait for an opportunity to ask, and something or other away back in my mind made we wish to avoid even that. A kind premonition sometimes protects us, just in this way.

Antonietta—Lubitza—Gisela. Gisela, some say, is derived from a Turkish word and is a not infrequent given name in Vienna. There is a Gisela street there. It is the name of one of the Emperor's daughters. It would be a supremely fitting name for my new divinity, as it means "beautiful," but I believed that her patronymic could not be "Tomanovich." Was my divinity, then, Antonietta?

I gazed across at Perzagno, whose long waterline began just in sight and immediately disappeared around a bold projecting point far across the shimmering gulf. Antonietta? Somehow the name did not seem to fit her, for she was not a small woman, my divinity, and I could not think of her by this name. Antonietta ought to belong to a little saucy feminine imp; not to a stately woman. Still, girls generally receive their names while still too young to go into society and mistakes are sometimes made. Antonietta! Of itself the name is pretty, but I hoped it was not the one.

It was geting too hot, so I rose and retraced my

steps to the coffee house. Enrico saw me and ca
at once. We were almost alone in the place at t
hour. I decided to risk another question or two.

"Enrico, you know that this matter I have tall
of is very private?"

"Dottor, bya the Virgin I will neva spik it
anybody!"

"All right. Do you know anybody here by
name of Coloricio?"

"No, Dottor."

"Do you know anybody named Tomanovich?"

"I nota remember thisa name, Dottor."

"Ask one of the waiters who has been here lon
if he knows either of these names, but don't ment
me and don't ask another thing. Wait a few m
utes after leaving me before you ask."

Enrico was intelligent. He dusted tables and
chairs to rights. He went to the gate and ha
wordy argument with a hack-man about to start
Cettinje. He flirted with two or three maids on
Riva. Indeed, he did it so well that I began
think he had forgotten his errand. Finally he sa
tered into the coffee house itself, lazily swinging
towel. After a long time he reappeared and joi
me.

"I have found. Coloricio live in Stolivo, a
Tomanovich in Perzagno. We nota know Color
much. Tomanovich, he richa man—have w
vineyards."

"Enrico, do you know these names? Think w
—I showed the two:

Lubitza Tomanovich,
Gisela Tomanovich.

"Could either of these be the famous beauty
spoke of who lives in Perzango?"

He studied them with knit brows.

"Yes, Dottor, I think Gisela the fronta name—but she nota Gisela Tomanovich;—thata sure!"

"Would you know the name if you heard it?"

"I think so."

"Are you sure your friend got all the names of the wedding party?"

"He say so, Dottor."

I longed for the Ingenieur.

"Look here, Enrico. Here is a name your friend got wrong. He is named Overmann;—not Luvermann. Do you know him?"

Enrico clapped his hands to his head and what he said sounded much like cursing; but it was in Italian.

"Cut it, Enrico! You will attract attention. What is the matter?"

"Oh, Dottor, jesta wait until I geta that friend of mine! I'll"——

"Never mind, Enrico! He did the best he could and he has done well, too. Do you know the Ingenieur?"

"Sure. He often here. He goin' marry with Lubitza Tomanovich—thisa name here."

In another instant, clear as a bell, the riddle was solved. The mention of the Ingenieur's prospective marriage to the wine grower's daughter was the needed link. So this lovely girl was the one of which the priest at Perasto had told us! Descendant of the "Accursèd Roccos" and of the crabbed old sister who had lived in the queer old house in Perzagno and whose cousin, daughter of the vineyard owner, was to marry an Austrian officer! She would be Gisela Portulan then—not Gisela Tomanovich. Possibly she was sometimes called Tomanovich, since she resided in her uncle's home, and this would explain Enrico's friend's mistake



in making up his list. True, the old priest had not mentioned her beauty, but priests, I supposed, were not given to commenting upon such a point. I wrote the corrected name and showed it to Enrico.

"Is this the name I am searching for?"

"Yes! Yes, Dottor, thata it!"

It had been a good morning's work. I had identified her without confiding in anybody but Enrico, and I believed he would remain faithful. And as a matter of fact, he did.

It would be easy to learn all about her now, for now I could ask about her as some one I knew by reputation, as everybody else did, and I needed but ask the more intelligent acquaintances I might meet. Already I knew what she was. Of the old Venetian blood—one of the few purer survivors of that stock to be found on the gulfs,—and descended from the Secretariat. I would have a surprise for Harry when he got back that evening. "Little dago with a pair of eyes and a pair of ideas" indeed! I would have no mercy on Harry. This would make him squirm, for he loved "family" and "good blood' and "mediæval connections," and talked more than most men of such things. I determined that I would never let him forget that phrase. So I made my way to luncheon in good spirits, the same being duly tempered by uncertainty as to the future, and with the name "Gisela" ringing in my ears.

The history of the Krivosjie, country of the people so insubordinate to the Austrian government, had interested Harry greatly, and I knew that his plan was, if he could get a satisfactory horse at Risano, to make a visit into that karst region. Thus

he might be back that evening, but I scarcely expected him. On my side, I determined to visit Perzagno after the heat of the afternoon had passed. I did not expect to further my quest by this, but I wished to see the long strung out old city once so opulent through Venetian trade, and possessing so many relics of those richer days. Also I wanted to see the triple house of the three sisters.

So about half past four found me being rowed along the shore of the Gulf opposite the town of Cattaro, almost forgetful of all else in the wild beauty of the locality, which was unfolding itself into a new aspect every moment. Away behind us, down in the southernmost angle of the gulf lay picturesque Cattaro (the old Roman Ascrivium), like a jewel in a setting, the latter being a lofty outlying bastion of the Lovçen, up which straggled the zig-zag walls, continuations of the fortifications, which included in their area the high-lying chapel of the Madonna della Salute, and also on the very peak of the rocky bastion, the ancient citadel. With my field-glases I could make out the great rock on the mountain side, off to the left, iron strapped to the rocky table to guard against its possible fall into the town below. Further southward the Lovçen itself reared its height. The serpentine road into Montenegro looked, at this distance, like a series of zig-zag pen-scratches up the side of the mountain, whose bleak gray-black mass gives both the name to the country of the Montenegrins, and the promise of the forbidding land which the traveler will find there.

The afternoon had cooled pleasantly by the time our barque was passing the lower end of Perzagno. By and bye we came to the house—Le Tre Sorelle. I did not need the exclamation and

pointing finger of my boatman, for I knew it instantly; it could only be this one, and no other. An old weather-worn time-stained ruin, separated from the water only by the inevitable rock-piers and the road which followed the shores. Three gables fronted on the gulf and ran from front to back. The ground floor gateway of the middle division was still usable and furnished with a heavy wooden door—those on the sides had been walled up. Over each gate was a window in which had once been iron bars. In the second floor of each was a fair-sized once ornate window on the gulf. One was still open, one was walled up, and the third was closed partly by stones, and partly by some sort of a tablet bearing an inscription no longer wholly legible. Tiny windows in the third floor under the gable ends were still open. These last had probably furnished light to "witches' kitchens," for in those old days in this warm land this homely but necessary office was generally located just under the roof. On the north side was a small wing with a plain sloping roof—this wing being of less height than the rest of the house, and seemingly a later addition, since its masonry was different. In the middle of the front of the house were the remains of a more or less ornate Venetian balcony. The roofs of the gables were still intact, but that of the wing was gone. Behind the house was a stairway and portico of stone by which the second floor could be reached directly. The whole stood in a sort of areaway formed by stone walls abutting against the hillside behind.

A queer monument indeed to a father's despair over three vixen daughters, to remain after all these years to tell the right sad tale! I wondered in which division old Albina Portulan herself had

lived. Probably she had occupied all of them after Providence had relieved her of her other sisters.

I was keen to explore the interior—the ground floor gate stood open to any comer—but I did not dare. I would not have met Gisela under such circumstances for the world. Of course this house must be situated upon old Tomanovich's property and Gisela might even now be within sight or hearing somewhere—with which thought I am quite sure I stood a little straighter and smoothed out my clothes.

The ruin exerted an almost unholy fascination, as I stood in the white roadway and dreamed over it. Its façade seemed sentient and to exhibit something of the passing shades of a living face. Grim, gaunt and frowning, it yet seemed to invite entrance and nearer acquaintance, then and there, and it was only by a real effort that I finally turned away and wandered eastward along the ancient town.

By the time I had made the round it was getting late and I had wandered rather far from my barque, so I began my return trip along the fine but narrow military road which skirts the gulf.

In coming over to Perzagno that afternoon I had rather risked than desired any chance meeting with Gisela, for it would be neither a favorable time nor place. I conceived that I was bound to find some formal way to her acquaintance, either in the local military staff or among the influential residents. But such a method would consume many days before our ultimate meeting. I wished there were a shorter way.

I was occupied with these thoughts when I rounded a winding of the road where the gulf

jutted into the land, forming a little round bay, the curve of which was followed by the road. On the opposite end of this curve I saw two figures coming along with bent heads, seemingly in earnest conversation. The man's figure looked familiar and I unslung my glasses and brought them to bear upon him.

It was the Ingenieur. His companion was a pretty woman, just a trifle short, but still of fine figure—a brunette, with as nearly as I could tell, rather a Servian than Italian cast of countenance. She was speaking seriously and the Ingenieur was listening intently to what she was saying.

What should I do? It would have been easy enough to avoid them. I had only to step back between two houses into one of the wooded gardens which lay just behind nearly every one, and wait there until they had passed. I started to do this, but reconsidered. After all, perhaps the Ingenieur had not meant to "shake" us—except, perhaps, for that evening only. It had only been day before yesterday, and perhaps he had been too much occupied to hunt us up in the meantime. Besides, why should he expect us to avoid meeting him? He knew we were here, and must realize, if he thought of it at all, that such a chance was not among the impossibilities. Added to this, he was the very man to help me. He was to marry Gisela's cousin. I would cheerfully satisfy his most exacting demands regarding my credentials. I decided to let him see me and allow him to address me first if he were so disposed.

I drew from a pocket a local map with which I could pretend to be occupied and seated myself upon a stone on one of the piers at a little distance from the road.

After some time they drew near. I knew they had seen me for they had ceased to converse. As they were nearly opposite I looked up. The Ingenieur kept his eyes resolutely along the road and she hers upon the ground. It was the cut direct.

If there had been any doubt in my mind it was dispelled the next moment, for after they had gone some way, I injudiciously turned my head and looked after them. The Ingenieur still kept his face to the front, but she had turned her head and was observing me as I looked up. We both turned away again at the same instant, and I folded my map and started on.

I was angry. He might have spoken to me, I thought. True, in electing not to do so, he had only exercised a personal right. We had been but slightly acquainted in Vienna, since then only traveling companions without obligation on either side. Having now a woman companion he had only exercised the Code—albeit rather severely. But, since he exercised the Code thus, I resolved that I would be the one to apply it when next we met.

But the worst of it was the certainty that from now on the Ingenieur would be a stumbling-block in my path. That way to Gisela's acquaintance was worse than closed. Therefore I determined to write that very evening to Count Albert Weyer-Reinbach and to Major Scarlatti, for letters.

Contrary to my expectations, I found upon arriving at the hotel that Harry had returned, having been unable to make proper arrangements for his excursion into the Krivosije. I hastily swallowed my dinner and repaired to our regular trysting place in the Dojmi.

He was enthusiastic over his day and ramb on over it in talk for nearly an hour, during w'



I managed between fires to write the two letters. The latter finally attracted his attention.

"Writing home?"

"No, to Vienna for letters of introduction."

"Well, well. Not cooled off yet? I supposed you would be more reasonable by now. Have you found out anything?"

"Yes, a good deal. The little dago with two eyes and two ideas is simply Gisela Portulan, the descendant of the Roccos and of the sisters of Le Tre Sorelle whom the priest at Perasto told us about."

He whistled. "The Accurséd Roccos!" he muttered. I pretended not to hear this.

"Moreover, I am not alone in admiring her. It seems she is well known all over the gulfs for her beauty."

"So much the worse!"

"How so?"

Harry turned on me, more earnestly than was his wont. The embarrassment of a former occasion returned, but passed as he proceeded:

"Ed, when we were small boys we used to fight; but I don't remember liking you any the less for that. And now in the few days we have been together, I have come to like you as much as I am ever likely to any other man than myself" (we shook hands cordially and I answered, "Returned with compound interest, old boy!"), "but, Ed, I tell you again I know these people better than you do, because I have been in Europe eight or nine times as long as you have, and besides, in my situation, I have more time and opportunity to learn to know Europeans in general and Italians in particular than you do in your busy clinical life. You know their bodies better than I, and can name their muscles and nerves from top-knot to great toe" ("softly—softly,

Harry!" I murmured), "but I know their minds better. Compared to Anglo-Saxons, the people of the Continent are a false lot, Ed. They sometimes have a plating of sincerity, but you have only to scratch it to find the bad metal underneath. Honor and fair play are known to them as mere tools to use when it will save time or serve them best; that is, as means, but never as principles. This is true of all of the great class we come in contact with, Ed, and the exceptions are too rare to be worth discussing. Sojourning Americans who come over here for two or three months in the summer season and find everybody they come in contact with bowing and scraping in the hope of a stray centime, get drunk on this cheap flattery and always forget to look at the real European; never get below the surface of the thin veneer of obsequiousness. Those of better observation are seldom in Europe long enough, or in any one place long enough to analyze the people they find here, and nine times out of ten go home with the notion that these people are like ourselves, but more courteous and self-sacrificing. Nothing could be more false! Here they taunt us Americans with being a money-grubbing nation! But there are a thousand things which the European will do for money, which the Anglo-Saxon will not consider for any purpose; a thousand metres of depravity into which he will descend, into which the native-born American will not even look! And of all their faults, the gravest one is their falseness—man, woman and child! And of all Europeans the Italian is the falsest. Even in your own Austria there is a proverb 'False as a Italian.' You must have heard it often."

I grew warm, but Harry was meaning well by me, at least, so I forgave him. I answered:



"Yes, I have heard the saying often enough in Vienna, but there they curse and sneer at everything that is not Viennese, although still Austrian. It is one of the very things which show how provincial a city Vienna is. They sneer at everybody; poke fun at the Bohemians, call the Poles barbarians; call the Roumanians and Italians false, and curse the Magyar because he sticks to his own nationalism, and refuses to become a lick-spittle of the Monarchy. But there is no use arguing this, Harry. We simply do not agree, and can't agree. Besides, these people here are Dalmatians, and I have never heard the Dalmatians called false—not even in Vienna."

"These people here in southern Dalmatia are Servo-Italian. The Servian is a decadent nation and the Italian is false, Ed!"

"I do not believe that all Italians are false or that all Servians are decadent. I tell you again that Dalmatians have a good name—even in Vienna."

"I know what I am talking about, Ed! What the Italian is in Italy he is here. This thing means you no good. You are in for trouble at one end or other of the line. If you meet, win and marry this girl without getting a stiletto in your back in the process, you will have your troubles later. Remember, Ed, the American woman has her liberty before marriage, the European woman takes it afterward."

"Let us talk no more of this, Harry!"

"As you will. I mean you well—and I know what I am saying. You can never say you went your way blindly!"

"No, I can never say that. But the matter is still far off, and to-day seems farther away than ever."

With this, I proceeded to relate the result of my meeting with the Ingenieur.

He whistled again.

"Well! That was the behavior of a puppy! He could have saluted you without stopping!"

"Truly!"

"Also that puts a block under your wheel. If he is to marry the cousin of this girl and has cut you upon first running across you here, he certainly will prevent your meeting his prospective wife's cousin. Now the worst that can happen is that you will waste valuable time instead of seeing this interesting locality."

"We shall see!"

"Come, Ed, give it up and go with me into Montenegro. Then we will go slowly northward together. Ragusa is said to be one of the most romantically fascinating spots in the world, and at Spalato are the remains of the great palace Diocletian built after abdicating, and in which he spent his last years. We can visit Salona and its interesting Roman and Early Christian remains, and some of the islands of the coast. They say that Zara contains the most beautiful women in the world, and that they are pure Italian—since Italian seem to attract you. This girl here will be like or of the oranges on that tree which grows in th midst of that inaccessible grotto up yonder. Yo can watch them growing there, but you cannot g one. Let's go to Montenegro to-morrow mornin

If Harry did not convince me, he was certai a revelation. I had never known him! He ac ally had a tremble in his voice, and gripped hand and held it. I wrung his paw, and althou there were no words about it, there was seal then and there, a warm and deep friendship wh has endured through many years and many v situdes, to this day.

I acquiesced so far that the Montenegro journey should be set for the morrow. Until my letters should arrive that was as good a way of marking time as any other. Moreover, a happy thought had visited me, and this was only Wednesday with Sunday still four days away.

CHAPTER IV.

"I REPEAT again, Ed, you are engaged in a dangerous enterprise."

We were bowling down the great serpentine from Montenegro. We had had two interesting days at Cettinje, had visited Lake Scutari and some other spots and were now returning to Cattaro. Harry's remark did not refer directly to my love affair but to an offshoot of it.

Among other democratic features of Cettinje is the prison. It is a small, low building, in the center of the town, located within an inclosure surrounded by a common fence which any schoolboy can leap. The prisoners are allowed to go into this inclosure by day without distinction as to the offence for which they are confined, except those convicted of homicide in which case the right ankle and wrist are left connected by a short heavy chain. Guards there are, but they are lenient and jovial, and the inmates may converse with persons outside of the fence, provided the prisoner do not approach the fence too closely and the conversation be not too long.

Harry found this of interest, as several of the prisoners spoke Italian and in like manner I found one who spoke German. After a time as we were about to leave I observed a contortion of countenance on the part of the one with whom I had bee conversing, who, at this time (he was not chained prisoner, and was therefore less clos watched by the guards) was standing a little a from the others.

I moved a step or two toward him in order to be out of the guard's hearing. The latter, because I was a mere foreign tourist and possibly also for deeper reasons, did not seem disposed to notice us. As soon as I was near enough, the prisoner asked:

"What are you?"

"A man."

"Oh, I am quite sure of that," he answered with a laugh. "I mean of what country are you?"

"American."

"I thought so. You are American and therefor keep your given word."

"It does not follow. That is only our religion. Not all practise it."

"I am sure you do. Will you do something for me?"

"If it be not unlawful."

"It has nothing to do with the laws of Montenegro. I have a packet here in my belt. It is small. I want it safely and secretly delivered to a man in Cattaro. Will you do it?"

"Will it get me into any trouble?"

"Not the least risk if you are only secret, before and afterward."

"Why do you not get a Montenegrin to do it? There are many in Cattaro every day."

"Montenegrins are watched. No attention will be paid to you when you visit this man's house."

"Oh, there *is* a risk, then. Please"——. The guard was drawing near, and I asked:

"What was your offence? Did you kill somebody?"

"Oh, no, you see I have no chain. I was drunk and had trouble in a coffee house."

The guard drew away again.

"Please excuse me. I am trying to keep out of mischief—not to get into it."

He laughed.

"I am not really laughing, sir, but our conversation must not seem too earnest. Sir, if you will do this, the person who receives this package will pay you money—much money, providing he find the seals unbroken."

A thought struck me. Perhaps this was the "shorter way" I was looking for. For when Europeans will pay money—"much money" for a service, they are at their wits' end and are employing a last resort. If they will pay money—"much money," they will cheerfully substitute any other thing you want in place of money.

"Who is the man in Cattaro?"

"I cannot tell you unless you agree to take the packet to him."

"Is he a man of importance down there?"

"Yes, indeed. A very rich man."

I conned it over. It seemed safe enough. The prisoner continued:

"You must decide quickly."

"If I give my word to take it, you must give yours that I shall be safe in doing so."

"I give my word, provided the seals be not broken, and you never mention it, now or afterwards."

"All right. I'll take it to him. How am I to get the packet?"

"You see this corner of the prison fence? There, where the school children are playing? Now count to the eleventh post up that side. It is hollow. It is closed by a knot which you can pull out. Come here after dark and you will find the packet in there."

"To whom shall I deliver it?"



"To the banker Sbutega in Cattaro, and only into his own hands when no other person can see him take it."

We were barely in time, for the guard was coming again. The latter courteously informed me that it was not allowed to talk too long with the prisoners. I touched my hat, receiving a courteous return salute and departed.

That night I obtained the packet. Of course I would keep faith reasonably but it was not in the nature of things and also not prudent to keep the matter from Harry, so I had told him about it. He repeated his remark.

"It is dangerous. Of course I see why you were willing to undertake it. But in doing so you have placed yourself at the mercy of the convenience of both the prisoner and the banker. If either need to do so, in the future, he will sacrifice you without the bat of an eye. I know the honor of these people. Living as you do in Vienna, you must know that the whole Balkans is a hot-bed of political intrigue, and, I take it, this is something of that sort."

"Well, I can't get out of it now."

"No, it would be even more dangerous *not* to do it now; but it is a pity you were not more prudent in the first place."

This conversation had occurred on Saturday evening. I did not give Harry's croaking much serious consideration, for my mind was full of the following Sunday morning. This last mentioned state of mind was due to a remark of the Ingenieur while we were on shipboard. He had said that all of the people of the gulfs who were near enough and had any clothes always went to Cattaro to church on Sundays, and promenaded the Marina

afterwards, remarking further that this was the time and opportunity to see the pretty women who lived here.

There are two cathedrals in Cattaro—the Roman Catholic and Servian Orthodox ("Greek") for here in Dalmatia the East and the West meet in religion as well as in other ways. This fact offered no special difficulty, however, for the two churches were within an easy stone's throw of each other, and Harry could go to one and I to the other. If Gisela and her people were at the church Harry visited he could come and signal me.

For a wonder Harry had agreed to this arrangement without demur. He said he should be able to recognize her if she were one-quarter the beauty I described. Probably his ready acquiescence was partly due to curiosity. It was an even guess which they would attend, and I left the choice to Harry. He chose the Catholic Cathedral, so the very glaring hot Sunday morning found me, in irreproachable flannel coat and duck trousers, wending my way to the "New" Cathedral.

I arrived too late for the Benediction, and the Prayer was already being read. I entered the vestibule and from the inner door cast a look over the woman's side of the church. There were many there, but none of the Tomanovich family had come, so I took my stand near the entrance meaning to be readily seen and signaled by Harry if he came.

The church was new (that is, was but some fifty odd years old), having replaced an older cathedral which had been destroyed by fire. It was a rather small but well-proportioned basilica, and had as yet but little interior ornamentation. Its decoration must be replaced, little by little, from decade to decade,

as the parishioners might be able to afford. The altar-screen * was complete, however, being covered from floor to ceiling by finely executed ikons. The light was soothing and the church was cool. The tall massive priest was reading the prayer in a monotone and the congregation stood, with heads bent, in silence. I understood not a word of what the priest was reading—neither did many of his people, for the vehicle of the service was the ancient basic Slavonic tongue which has long since given place to the many offshoots,—Russian, Polish, Bohemian, Servian and others—which now exist; but the air of reverence was, if anything, even more augmented by the resulting mystery of the service, as must always be the case in a stately church whose creed has the prestige of many successive centuries.

The priest and the diakon appeared before the altar bearing the Evangelium, and in the midst of antiphonal singing by the choir, I became aware of arrivals. Turning my head, I saw the Tomanovich family entering the vestibule. I saw the Ingenieur first, and at sight of him moved a little forward among the men and in front of a column. A verger preceded them, unlocked three pews well forward and ushered them in. The Ingenieur was accompanied by a large powerful-looking white-haired man whom I assumed to be Tomanovich

* The division wall between the auditorium and the sanctuary, it and its appurtenances being collectively called "the altar." The space it comprehends is relatively much smaller than the "sanctuary" of a Catholic or the "chancel" of an English Established or "Episcopal" edifice, and in the Oriental-"Orthodox" this sacred space occupies the apse, or extreme rear of the building, with no passage or aisle round about it.

himself, and by a tall handsome young man. I could give them scant attention as I sidled around my column as a squirrel does his tree. Some women also had come in but in my efforts to avoid being seen by the Ingenieur I forgot them for a moment. Now I saw that an elderly woman with a Slav face and a young woman, not Gisela, were being shown pews on the women's side, next to the Bishop's seat. That was all. Gisela had not come.

I swallowed my disappointment as best I could and began to observe the two women. The girl was the same one I had seen with the Ingenieur on the road at Perzagno. She was, doubtless, the fiancée, Lubitza. Her face was rather Oriental in type, but both she and her mother kept their faces forward during the reading of the Apostol and I could not study them further.

The keen sense of disappointment kept nagging at me and blunted the attention which the beautiful service deserved. I wondered why Gisela had not come, and various theories suggested themselves. Perhaps she was not allowed to attend church; but after a moment's thought I dismissed this idea. Perhaps she was ill, but I did not believe it—I did not believe she could ever be ill. Perhaps the family were divided in their creed and Gisela was now in the Roman cathedral. Old Albina had been Roman Catholic. But Harry had not come for me. Would Harry have sense enough to know her? There were other beautiful girls in Cattaro.

This thought assailed me until I turned to leave, but at this moment the priest went within the altar and the choir burst into the Ejeheroine. From the attitude of the congregation I saw that now we

no time to leave, so I kept my place. There was no organ or other instrumental accompaniment, but the choir was good and the stately measure and old style harmonious progressions made me forget my errand for the present—and I have always loved the odor of incense. After a time the central doors of the altar opened and the priest appeared bearing the Bread and Wine. The entire congregation fell upon their knees, many upon their faces. Being a stranger and a heretic, I experienced in this moment the same hesitation and embarrassment which always assail the uninformed Protestant when he happens to attend service in a Catholic or Greek church. I would have knelt, from respect if from no other consideration, but I was too late and found myself standing alone among the prostrate people. So I kept my feet; but now I could see every member of the congregation.

The priest and diakon made their processional among the people. As they passed to the back of the church my eyes followed them and caught sight of two women kneeling at the rear. One was old, evidently a serving-woman, and she was gazing earnestly at me. As I caught her eye she looked down again. Kneeling by her side was Gisela. Having recognized her, I could see her no more for a moment by reason of having to conceal the revulsion of feeling from disappointment to joy, by proper behavior and correct outward aspect, as became the time and place.

The priest finished his tour and again disappeared within the altar. The choir chanted a prayer during which the congregation rose and I could see her no longer.

I promptly forgot my arrangement to notify Harry and occupied myself with wondering if

Gisela had seen me. There was no sign of it—I had not caught her eye, and she was giving her whole attention to the service. I hoped she had seen me and believed she had, for the searching look from the owlish face of the serving-woman had meant especial interest of some sort, whether friendly or not I could not guess. I edged backwards until I reached the rear column, where I could see them again. I caught the eye of the serving-woman again. She was standing behind Gisela. Having given me a look she turned her head forward. From the corner of my eye I saw her bend forward and whisper in Gisela's ear. The girl grew rosy but kept her pretty head resolutely forward, and during the Inner Communion I spent my time gazing at her profile and listening to the stately choral music.

The priest came once more out of the altar bearing the Bread and Wine and the congregation formed a procession to partake of the general Communion, the men and women now mingling together. Gisela and the serving-woman moved forward with the rest, and I could see them no longer. I noticed that the Ingenieur did not go forward but waited in his place—a sure sign that he was not of this creed. Thus I was compelled for now, to make a business of keeping my column between me and him. After partaking of the Bread, the final prayer was read and the congregation broke up into groups, the priest being the center of one which included the elder Tomanovich and his family. I saw Gisela among those who were passing along the altar screen, kissing the Book, the Mother and Child, and other favorite ikons. The serving woman was strolling slowly up the women's sid I kept my eyes upon her and waited. She ca



past the rear column on her side and turned. For the moment we were alone, but not very near one another. She stood still and faced me with an expression which would have done credit to a Spanish inquisitor. Her eyes burned. I tried to smile in that owlish face but could not. I held out my hands, appealingly. She broke into silent laughter, gave me one more long look, and then, smiling derisively over her shoulder, went to the sacristan's table where she laid down a coin. The sacristan took up two fresh candles and went forward with her to light and place them in sconces at one end of the altar-screen. The serving-woman, coming back, met Gisela at the Bishop's chair and they stopped to talk. I sidled around my column far enough so they, but not the Ingenieur, could see me. They seemed convulsed with laughter and I caught Gisela's laughing eyes once. They consulted—they seemed to argue—they laughed silently at me. Nothing daunted, I held out my hands again. They turned their backs, shaking. Gisela dropped her little hand bag. I had seen her drop it twice during the service. She seemed never to be able to hold it. The serving-woman picked up the reticule and opened it, drawing from it what seemed to be a little tablet of paper or memorandum book. Gisela put out her hand as if in protest. Again they argued, and alas,—giggled. Finally Gisela seemed to give it up and walked away. The woman scribbled something on the little tablet, tore off the page, dropped this into the reticule and snapped it to, putting the remainder of the tablet into the breast of her own dress.

The various parties in the church were now breaking up, and I saw Gisela join the serving-woman again and take the reticule. She leaned against

the Bishop's seat in a very graceful, negligent attitude, the hand bearing the reticule resting against the back of the first pew which stood against the wall. She was very rosy and still bubbling over with suppressed merriment.

Old Tomanovich and the young man joined the Ingenieur, who was surrounded by others. They now moved toward the entrance and I hastened behind a column on the opposite side. The serving-woman went to Gisela and called her. Gisela once more dropped the reticule and I saw it fall behind the pew. The two women joined the rest of their party and they all moved toward the entrance and passed out.

I had seen the reticule fall, but was sure it was safe as the pew was solid to the floor and it could not be seen. There would be plenty of opportunity to get it later. At first I planned to do this at once and take the handbag to her, but realizing that such a proceeding would mean merely thanks and a courteous dismissal I decided to leave it where it was for the present and obtain it later in the day, in the hope of making a more certain use of my possession of it. Accordingly I followed the party to the door and watched them from within. They were having another reunion with their acquaintances outside, among which were a number of young men and three or four officers who found much to say to the male members of the family, but all of whose eyes were for Gisela. She seemed utterly oblivious of this, and joined a petite dark little girl almost as pretty as herself. They were joined by several young men but Gisela gave these scant attention and rejoined her family, their eyes persistently and regretfully following her.

Yes, she had plenty of admirers!



I thought the chattering and hand-shaking would never come to an end. The old Tomanovich seemed as enthusiastic in social intercourse as either of the girls, but finally their party gathered itself together and with many pauses, false starts and retracing of steps to say something more, they at last definitely started for the Marine gate. I followed.

After gaining the Riva the party separated. Old Tomanovich, the Ingenieur and the younger man proceeded in the direction of the Dojmi and the ladies made for their boat. They seemed to be going directly back to Perzagno.

I hesitated to follow, but Gisela gave a backward look, and her laughing eyes met mine once more. I saw little use in it, but I slowly followed. There were many people sauntering about, so the only notice I attracted was by reason of being a stranger.

The ladies stepped into their barque with many a saucy bit of repartee, with various friends standing about. A little farther down the Riva the noon boat from the north was being warped to the pier, and a dog fight had begun a little this side.

Between these attractions, the loiterers found inducement to move away and in a moment or two I was nearly alone with the party. The serving-woman gave me a stare, but Gisela did not look at me again. I moved away a few steps.

A commotion caused me to turn again, when I saw that Gisela with many pretty Italian gesticulations was anxiously giving directions to the serving-woman. I could not understand, but I was sure it was about the reticule. I regretted I had not brought it with me, but it could not be

helped now. The party did not wait but left the woman behind. She hastily made for the Marine Gate.

I followed her in I know not what expectation. The day was terribly hot and by the time I had reached the cathedral I was beginning to think that perhaps even a beautiful girl may sometimes not be worth while, for the woman's pace was pitiless. I entered the church just after her. The building was deserted except for ourselves, and I took up a position near the chair behind which I had seen the reticule fall and watched her from there. She searched about for some moments. Our eyes met more than once but she did not address me—only clasped her hands and raised her head in mock despair. I caught her eye once more, drew out the reticule, and took it to her.

She accepted it with her head down and promptly opened it. I saw a dainty handkerchief, a comb, a little round box which probably contained a powder puff, and some other things. She searched and found—alas! dolt that I had been—the little note. So *that* was why the reticule had been *forgotten!* But had she expected I would open and search it? What kind of men did they have here in Cattaro? I was at least acquitted of *that,* and the woman could give me the note now.

I held out my hand, but she dropped the note back into the reticule, snapped it to, and was off like a shot. At the church door she turned her head with a quizzical look and disappeared. Then came another hot chase to the Riva, this time with no thought of a beautiful girl not being worth while, even on such a day as this one, but with plenty of wrath at old women in general and this one in particular. As she flew through the long



arch of the Marine Gate she threw me another gay look which was doubtless meant to be teasing but which appeared diabolical.

I saw her open the reticule again as she flitted across the Marina, which was still deserted except for a couple of waiting barque-men, but without pause she began a bargain with the rowers. Words ran high and gesticulations were extensive and numerous. As I came up she turned with a voluble appeal to me, and to my relief, dropped the little note. I put my foot upon it. She climbed into the boat and they rowed away. She looked back with another arch look and I raised my hat. It is curious how differently the same look can appear under different circumstances!

After a look about, I picked up the note and retired to the cool arch of the Marine Gate to read it. It was in Italian, but was short, and while I did not understand the spoken tongue, I could read it a little.

"Cattedrale, domani, dopo pranso à tre ore—venir solo." Three o'clock Monday afternoon. The Cathedral, if open, would be sure to be deserted at that heated hour. Probably Monday was a Greek Church holy-day, for the Oriental Orthodox Church is usually closed on week days. I concluded that she would know.

If I had a subconscious thought that I would have preferred to meet her some other way—would have preferred that the initiative should have come more from myself—it was easy to put the thought away. There could be no cavil at the place and hour. Besides, as Harry so often had said, I did not know these people and their ways. Perhaps a local man would have found in it nothing but a

matter of course. Besides, maybe she had reasons of which I knew nothing, for the step. Anyway, I would be there—and I would "come alone."

CHAPTER V

THE following morning I made my visit to the banker. Having stated that I wished to see Signor Sbutega in person, I was conducted into his private office where, seated at a flat desk, was a man with snow-white beard, hair and eyebrows, rosy sun-tanned face and snapping black eyes full of life and fire. I could not guess his age within a dozen years. For a very rich man the appointments of his private office were wonderfully few and simple and everything looked like it had been owned and used by him for at least twenty years; but all was spotlessly clean and the old gentleman was neatly but comfortably attired in alpaca coat, fresh white shirt and collar and duck trousers. I envied him all but his years. He rose, bowed and directed me to sit opposite him. After a look at my card he said:

"Please excuse me for not moving up the chair myself, Herr Doktor. You young men are more active than we gouty old fellows."

I looked at him and laughed.

"I think you could pack me on your back to the Marine Gate without drawing a long breath."

He smiled pleasantly.

"No—perhaps once—but those feats are past with me now. Also, it is very hot, Doctor Ransome."

"Do you know Cettinje, Signor Sbutega?"

"Know Cettinje? I have lived here over thirty years, Doctor Ransome! However, it has been some time since I have dared to go there. Why?"

I silently handed him the envelope. He looked from it to me with his keen black eyes. Then with a courteous excuse, he left the room. After a few moments he returned.

"Do you know anything of this matter, Doctor?"

"Not a thing." Then I related the manner of my receiving it.

"Have you been careful, and above all, discreet?"

"I confided to my friend that I was carrying it."

"Is he an American?"

"Yes, Signor. I thought best that he should know that much—but he is safe, and no one but myself has seen the packet."

He re-seated himself and looked me up and down from under his bushy white brows, meanwhile drumming lightly on the desk with his fingers.

"Doctor, in this matter you have rendered certain persons a very great service—one deserving of liberality. Will you be offended if I offer you a thousand crowns as a partial acknowledgment?"

"Not offended, certainly, Signor, but"——

He looked at me keenly.

"Doctor Ransome, in such a matter I shall not reckon crowns and heller with you, you shall have two, three, four thousand, if you like."

His face was puzzled, but kind. Indeed he looked like a man who not only once had been youthful, but also like one who had not forgotten his youth.

"I don't want money at all, Signor. I am not rich but I have enough for my wants. Nor do I wish any reward as such for this small service. It was no trouble. But aside from any question of reward you can do me a very great kindness. If you like I will tell you what it is, and after you



know, you can do it for me or not as you think best. If you think best not to, we can simply forget the entire matter."

He leaned back in his chair.

"Let me hear it, Doctor."

His fresh, kindly old face had so won me that it seemed the most simple and reasonable way to give him freely my entire confidence. Besides, he was too keen and discerning to be deceived. Anyway it could do no harm. There was nothing discreditable in my wish and I was not ashamed of it.

"Do you know Signor Tomanovich who lives in Perzagno?"

He leaned forward on the desk and seemed full of interest at once.

"Very well—for many years."

"Well, I would like to meet him. I am perfectly willing to furnish you credentials."

"Is it a business matter?"

"I—oh—not exactly, Signor. It has, rather—a social cast."

For one instant his keen face was puzzled—and then the smile began. My own began and progressed seriatim with his, and after a moment the laugh was unrestrained on both sides.

Then he grew grave, and his eyes once more studied my face, this time for one or two minutes as it seemed. Then he gazed out of the window. There was some conflict or other going on behind that old-young face, for its expression varied every second. After a long time he began to speak, still looking out of the window.

"I think I understand. Your interest is in the maid Gisela, is it not? For the other, Lubitza, is to marry an Austrian."

"You are right, Signor."

"Of course, Doctor Ransome, it would be easy enough to do what you wish. Tomanovich is a long-time acquaintance of mine and our families have always been on fair terms. But—I don't know—just quite whether—it would be—best. In saying that, I am thinking of *your* welfare—not theirs, Doctor Ransome, and I beg of you never to repeat me. At least, you should have a little warning first."

My heart descended to my shoes.

"Is there anything wrong with the young woman, Signor?"

"*Oh, no!*" (My heart reascended.) "No, indeed! As far as I know she is, in every particular, as fine a young woman as ever counted beads, Doctor. But—well, the fact is, that the family is peculiar, and in a peculiar situation. In the first place, she is not Tomanovich's daughter—did you know that?"

"Yes, I know. Her name is Portulan."

He looked sharply at me again.

"Have you met her yet?"

"Not yet, Signor."

He smiled broadly again.

"Ah—still love from the street."

"Quite so. I have had a very brief account of her."

After a moment of silence:

"Then you know that she is of the accurséd Roccos and a great-granddaughter of Albina Portulan, who lived in Le Tre Sorelle and who was the last of the three sisters to survive. Old Albina was, in those days, supposed to be fabulously rich, because she finally inherited the entire possessions of her father, the last Rocco, who built that house.

But when she finally died, although still very

wealthy, she proved to have scarcely a fraction of the immense estate with which she was credited. What Rocco or she did with the bulk of it no one has ever known. All that could be found was the small property there in Perzagno, and several large vineyards on the islands of Lissa and Curzola, and in the Breno valley. For several years before her death she had lived in the town of Curzola, where her husband and father had been interred many years before. The heir, desperate over the shrinkage of the fortune, even went to the length of searching her husband's and father's very tomb, without ever finding a heller. Worse than all, she had left a peculiar will, whereby for two generations the remaining property was left in trust, the income only being available to the heirs, the full title of the property to be finally vested in the *granddaughter* of her son, and under a singular condition."

He paused and looked at me thoughtfully.

"By the bye, Doctor, I find myself about to discuss a rather private matter. So far, what I have told you is common property, but what I am about to relate, while not precisely a secret, is only known to a few. I shall not treat it as strictly confidential, but I will ask you to discuss it as little as possible here. Tomanovich is an old acquaintance and we have been variously associated in business. I would not care to have him learn that I have discussed his private affairs so freely. Still, I have taken a liking to you. We old men have only the quest of money left us as a pastime, but I can remember when, like you, there were things I put before money. I think it best, in your present enterprise, that you be put in possession of this information."

The old-fashioned courtesy of the banker was only equalled by the beauty of the German he spoke, the which put me to shame.

"I shall speak of the matter to no one but my friend, and not to him if you like."

"You may tell him of it. He is already in our confidence."

He resumed:

"Doctor Ransome, the most pious individuals in our world are the once gay women who, having grown too old to attract lovers, turn to the Confessional; and that, in a nutshell, is the history of Albina Portulan. Her son, whom I have mentioned, and who was her heir, was born out of wedlock; nor did she ever marry the father of this child, but another man. Also, her history continued checkered after her marriage. But in her last years, she was devoted to the Church. We would believe that the Church privately obtained the great missing part of her fortune, were it not for the fact that the church fathers seem to have been as bitterly wroth and disappointed, after her death, as the heir himself was.

Well, she left a will, as I have said, by which her real estate should descend to the great-granddaughter in the paternal line. Why the great-granddaughter rather than the great-grandson, is unknown to us.

This great-granddaughter of Albina is the present Gisela Portulan, in whom you are interested. Now the proviso in the will, under which she inherits, is this:

'Provided the said female heir, up to the time of her legal age, *never shall have broken a cardinal rule of the church;* or having broken it, shall have *atoned for the act by a marriage.*'

And the banker leaned back in his chair.

"Well, did she ever break a rule?"

"Not as yet."

"Why! Isn't she of age yet?"

"No, Signor. In Austria, legal age is twenty-four."

"Twenty-four! Hum. Well, where is the property to go in case she break a cardinal rule?"

"To her sister if there be one. If not, to the nearest female relative, who is nearest in age. Failing that, the property was to go to the Church. If she break the rule she will only inherit the worthless ruin known as Le Tre Sorelle. The nearest relative in age is Lubitza, her cousin, the daughter of Signor Tomanovich," said the banker, significantly.

I did not miss the meaning of his last sentence, but time was needed for it to dawn fully.

"Are those vineyards of much value?"

"Yes. Their value has never been unimportant, and during the last few years, since Dalmatian wines have come into a heavy demand, their value has appreciated very greatly. I suppose their value all together,—now,—would approach a million kronen."

"Who is the guardian?"

"Tomanovich. He passes as a wealthy man, but he is only rich in this property which he controls. If Gisela live according to the will until she be twenty-four, she will take all the family has. If she fall, she will have only Le Tre Sorelle, and Tomanovich's own daughter will have all."

"May Gisela marry before she come of age?"

"With her guardian's consent, yes; but he would not consent, and the marriage of a person under age without the guardian's consent, is illegal, and

can be set aside. The family has every interest in preventing such an event, and they have succeeded up to now. So far, this task has not been difficult for the girl has had no deep interests as yet. But, Doctor—ah—the people of Dalmatia are a good people—I must always say that—but they are likely to prove primitive where their interests are deeply involved. I warn you that if you seek this girl, that family will render your quest fruitless if they can, and I believe they would go as far as necessary in order to do so. Signor Tomanovich is a good man—I respect him highly—but,—well, Doctor, his sympathies are naturally with his own daughter in this matter, and—well, Doctor, have you understood my drift? Yes? Well, then, you now have the facts and the warning. For the rest, if you care to go on with the matter, I am at your service as far as lies within my power. If you like, you may take a day or two to think the matter over, and then command me."

But I did not need to think it over. I told him so, and he smiled once more, and gave his word. Just how to manage he did not yet see, but he would make a way and I should hear from him or it in due reasonable time. He put his arm about my shoulders as he saw me to the door.

Of *course* Tomanovich and his family would not wish Gisela to marry, as long as keeping her single left her property in their hands. The longer she remained single up to her maturity the more clear profit to them, and in the course of waiting for her legal age there were various chances that she might never reach it, or having reached it, have lost her property—then they would own all. But once married, her legal status was settled at once. With that event legally accomplished, they would become sen-



tenced to vacate on the date of her majority. Yes, it was clear enough that anyone who sought Gisela's hand would have to face difficulties and perhaps dangers. The old banker's warning had not been evoked by an imaginary cause.

It was past lunch time when I left the counting-house, but not being hungry and desiring a little more time for the matter before I spoke with Harry, I made my way out to my former place in the military park where I could think over the banker's communication and gaze across the sunny gulf at the town where she lived.

I felt no more than a passing interest in her estate—at any rate, I was not more sincerely interested in her since learning of her estate than I had been before. Besides, the person who has enough for his wants, be that ever so little, is already rich. Tomanovich might keep the estate, or his daughter might take it for all I cared. Also, a compromise might be possible, and I would be perfectly willing. But would Gisela look at the matter in that light? Giving up somebody else's estate and giving up your own are two different things. However, these were idle speculations now.

With the thought that he who does not try for a thing is the one who is most certain never to obtain it, I dismissed the matter for the present, and sought my room to have a freshening up before it came time to keep the tryst set for three o'clock.

CHAPTER VI.

I WAS first to arrive, and began to kill time by examining the church.

The interior was simple, and except the elaborate altar screen with its ornate ikons, offered small opportunity for loitering. I made the most of the latter, and after all found them not lacking in interest in their odd combination of minute portrait painting and overlaid gold work. One in particular was a picture of the Mother and Child, and lay on a desk beside the Holy Book. The painting and gold work on this would have borne examination with a strong lens. This piece of work had so engaged my attention that a low laugh startled me, and turning I saw a woman standing beside a column not far away.

The glare from the pavement outside the door blinded me for a moment, but upon walking that way I recognized my enemy-friend, the serving-woman. She was smiling broadly. As I came up she announced:

"Well, Signor, I am here. Are you not delighted?"

I cast a look about but saw no one else. At this she lauged out.

"It is many a long year since I have had a love affair. I had about given up. But we never grow too old, Signor. And a nice, fresh young man like you, too! I was little dreaming of such luck last Saturday. We'll have a good time together, won't we, darling?"



I looked about again—a little uneasily this time.

"I was so embarrassed yesterday!" and she hung her ridiculous old head. "I didn't dare to talk to you. Just think of it! But I have been dreaming of you all night long, and this morning I could hardly wait until it came time to come over. Are you not flattered?"

"You da— delightful old—tease! Where is"—

"Old *tease!* Why! I expected to have had a warm kiss by now! Where is that supplicating look you gave me during the service only yesterday morning? And where are those praying arms? They are hanging by your sides like a couple of salami tied to dry on a beam! Do you think you are looking at the ghost of your great-grandmother?" (Her voice became wheedling.) "Never mind, Signor. We older girls are better than the young ones. We know better! Come to my arms and let us fly somewhere away from the world where we can love one another forever with no one by!"

Thoroughly convinced that I had a mad woman to deal with I was dodging her arms and sidling this way and that. I made a rapid calculation. By making a furious run as far as the entrance, I reckoned I would have time to take an ordinary pace as far as the first corner before she would reach the door. Then I could bolt again. With this idea in mind I had sidled about the columns until I finally got her between me and the altar, and then I started. I had made about three bounds when I was arrested by a peal of laughter which echoed and re-echoed strangely, seeming to come from a dozen different directions. I stopped, stumbling and sliding on my feet, and looked back at her. She was doubled up, and between laughs was beckoning me to return. I went back to her. As

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I returned, her laugh died out and her face resumed its owlish severity.

"Did you think me such a fool, Signor? Look better! Let an old woman have her joke, and be not offended."

"By all means! Even more if you like."

"I have finished joking. Now to business. What do you want?"

"First, my good lady, who are you, before I give you my confidence?"

"All very well, but first, who are you? It is mine to ask first."

"An American physician, at present residing in Vienna, here on a summer outing,—one who can give good references."

"A doctor. Hum! *They* are never rich!"

"Because their patients never pay if they can help it. I am neither rich nor poor."

"Ah, well—what do you want?"

"I wish to meet and know your mistress—she is your mistress, isn't she?—the Signorina Portulan."

She looked at me steadfastly without reply.

"Will you help me?"

"I'll think it over. Are you in love with her?"

"Little doubt of that!"

"With her, or her wealth?"

"I did not know she was rich, or is to be, when I first saw and loved her."

"Hum! You wish to marry her?"

"Forgive me, I'd rather talk that over with her. Now, please, who are you?"

"A servant, but a little more, I believe. Her nurse when she was a child. Her personal maid now—also her only real friend—here."

"Will you help me?"

"What will you give me if I do?"



I am not more honest than other men, nor do I have finer feelings; but there was some survival of delicacy, decency, æstheticism, or whatever you please, away back in my mind, which sprang up in revolt against bribing my way to Gisela's acquaintance. Moreover self-respect argued that it ought not to be necessary. Gisela was a beautiful woman, but she was no princess or arch-duchess's daughter, and socially was my equal; not a superior. My temper rose a little. Besides, it is never well to be in a servant's power.

"Not a heller! Not a thing in the world except my thanks. I will not meet your mistress through bribery!"

The old woman bent, took my hand and kissed it. Then she spoke again with far less owlishness, and much more respect.

"Forgive me, Signor. I see you are not like the men here. I could be rich by now if I had brought to my mistress all the men who have offered to pay me. Nevertheless, I have never done it—yet. If you had offered me money, I would never let you meet her if I could help it."

She studied me again a moment.

"But I must know something more. I asked you if you want to marry her. Signor, young men do not always think of marriage when they love a girl!"

Now her eyes fairly burned into mine. They almost scorched; and they brought more light to me as to what this old retainer was.

"Signora, I could never wish anything but marriage from your mistress given that I still love her after I come to know her. I must know her first —must at least know the tones of her voice, before I ask marriage of her, but it will be either marriage

or honest friendship. I'll never, knowingly offend her, or ever say anything in her presence that her own mother could not hear!"

"Her mother *will* hear all you ever say to her, for she is among the Saints, and They know all we say and do! Signor, does *your* mother live?"

"No, she is also gone."

"Signor, swear by the memory of your mother, who now hears us both, that you, never in your lifetime, will ever say or do a dishonorable thing to my child!"

"With all my heart! By the memory of my mother, I swear it!"

Her face changed completely. The tears came, and the longing yearning look that came over it proved clearly enough that she did look upon her mistress as "her child." I saw that she was one of those faithful retainers which are sometimes found in old European families and of which we, in America, wot not of; aye, that she was even more than a faithful retainer; and my feelings for her underwent the corresponding change. She addressed me again.

"Signor, there is much to tell you, but it will keep until the Signorina herself can talk to you. For the present—you shall have your wish. I would not do it even now, but the Signorina has seen and liked you, and I will help her to anything she wishes that is her right, and is for her good. But do not trifle with her. Young men may be honest and honorable, but still do great harm, more harm than they know or guess, by trifling. She has never cared for a man, and when she does, it will be with her whole heart and for her lifetime. Promise me that you will not trifle, too!"

"Girls also trifle, Signora."



"It does not hurt a man."

"You cannot always know. A man buries such things, but they often gnaw and gnaw, and spoil all that is good in him. Never mind. I promise to be always in earnest, whatever I do."

"And I promise for the Signorina that she will never trifle with you. That promise is easy! I know her. Come, then!"

This conversation had occurred near the altar-screen. The woman led the way down the nave to the center of the church and came to a stand-still beside a column; turned and faced me once more, now with her former quizzical look but without its owlishness.

"Did you fall in love with my mistress yesterday in church?"

"Oh, no—days before that—when I first saw her."

"When was that?"

"St. John's evening. She was on the shore at Dobrota, and I was in a boat, out on the gulf."

"*Jesus,* Mary and J—! And you loved her then? Why, how could you see what she was? And did you gather seeds of the fern on that day in order to be able to read our thoughts?"

"I saw her well enough to love her! What do you mean by gathering the seed of the fern?"

"Never mind! It is dangerous knowledge. Leave it to the wretched Morlachs. Now, really, Signor, you fall in love easily! Would not some other girl do you as well? Say one fifty-four years old like me? As I told you, we know how!"

"It might have been, Signora; but you see, I saw your mistress before I saw you."

She laughed again, and following her eyes, I saw a portion of a skirt which had escaped the shel-

ter of the column nearest us. Finding that she was discovered, she came from behind the column, still full of laugh, but also a little shamefacedly. Her naturally high color was still higher, more so than the heat outside warranted, and as she slowly came up to us her eyes sought her hands. As she came up to us, she gave me one quick look and started as if to retreat, but the woman spoke to her in Italian and she stopped, half-turned away from me.

The pretty little mouth was, after all, a rather firm one. You did not see much of the upper lip and the lower one was a very little full. The ear, like a tiny warm-white shell peeped out from behind intensely black hair, the last being dressed widely at the sides and piled high on the back of her head. It encroached by its growing roots far forward upon her temples toward the eyebrows. She wore no hat.

The cheek and neck were a symphony in brownish cream and rose, and the shapely little chin was trembling. The little nose had just a slight fullness at the tip, but was so delicate and harmonized so well with her dainty profile that this was far from being a fault. But I wanted to see her eyes; and besides, I must, somehow, end this moment of embarrassment if I did not wish her actually to run from the place. I turned to the woman.

"Does the Signorina speak German?"

"Oh, yes, she speaks it well. She is teased just now, but she will talk enough later on—never fear!"

"Not as much as you teased me yesterday and to-day."

I saw from the corner of my eye that Gisela joined in our laugh.

"You deserved it, Signor, for being so 'dumb'!"



"She came from behind the Column."
(Accursed Rocco.)

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"Yes I was 'dumb,' but that was from being too anxious. If I knew women better, I would have been readier to see my chance."

"The Signor does not know women, then?"

"Almost not at all."

The woman scoffed.

"Ah! The Signor does not know women and lives to-day! Well, you and the Signorina belong together! I had to plan for her yesterday. I even wrote the note for her. She would have looked at you and gone home again; next time looked, and gone home. This was too slow for *me*."

"It would have been too slow for me, too!" I answered laughing. Then I turned to the girl.

"Signorina, I first saw you St. John's day—in the evening, from a boat in the gulf—and I have been determined to meet and know you ever since that moment."

Her eyes were upon me now—she looked me straightly and frankly in the face.

Her eyes would have made her beautiful if she had not had another claim to comeliness. Brown, straight and frank in their glance, set within lids straight from side to side. One feature which rendered the eyes so specially beautiful was the fact that the overhang of the upper lid just cut, with its lowest line of contour, the outer middle of the edge of the upper lid. This feature gave the eyes a certain appeal—even sadness, when in repose, an effect further emphasized by the little blunt upward points formed a little past the middle of the delicate brows. The forehead was wide and the face tapered to the chin in a full oval, but without any of the lunkiness of the lower jaw which so often spoils an otherwise beautiful Italian face. Just a depression in the chin where a dimple might

have been, and the lights and shadows about the jolly yet firm little mouth with the perceptible tendency of the lower lip to pout—all made a picture of young womanly loveliness, that, once seen, is not to be forgotten.

But at my address her face brightened, the eyes opened wider and the lips parted in a laugh which permitted the sight of two lines of perfect teeth.

"I saw you, too," Gisela answered, "but not very well. But I knew it was you when I saw you yesterday."

"Signorina, I fear I stared at you most discourteously yesterday, but"——

"Oh, she is used to that," broke in the serving-woman cynically.

"Yes, they always turn and look at me when I go on the streets."

This was uttered without a suspicion of egotism, —without a sign of a smirk or simper, only in naïve half-wonderment that it should be so.

"Yes, of course. Whoever sees you, Signorina, must stare more or less. But no doubt the young men here would have managed more neatly than I fear I did. Allow me to apologize, Signorina."

"You *did* stare!" said Gisela, laughing, "but I was not angry, Signor, otherwise I would not be here. You looked at me *differently* from most men, Signor. Women do not have to grow old to know if a man's stare be offensive or not, and if the look be an honest admiring one, why—well,—are we not here to be admired?"

"*Emphatically,* yes!" (The laugh simply could not be kept back.)

"Besides, I—returned it, did I not?"

Again her face took on a higher color and she half turned away. She was attired in a very simply

but very well made dress of rough yellow silk, was well corsetted and booted, and her full, fine figure was well displayed in this attitude. She was neither too big nor too little, and was an unstudied picture of natural grace, such as the open outdoor life of Dalmatia is sure to produce in those blessed by fine health.

"I wish I could trade stares with you every day!"

Her laugh rang out again like a silver bell.

"Better only Sundays—then you won't grow weary of the pastime."

"But, gracious, Signorina! I don't live in Cattaro!"

"Move here, then."

"Ah, Signorina. After all, you are like other girls. There is no limit to what they will ask."

"Are all girls like that?"

"Every one!"

"I thought you said you knew girls almost not at all!"

"I think I said I did not know women. I said nothing about girls."

"And what is the difference between girls and women, then?"

"Girls demand without limit; women command within limits."

She danced a step.

"Caught again! After all, your ignorance of women also, does not seem irreparable!"

"Alas! You merely happened to ask the one thing I happened to know."

"Very sorry. I would not have thought, from your face, that your life had been so hard, that you would only know *that* about them. You bear troubles well, Signor! But you are still young—you can learn more."

"I could ask no better teacher than you, Signorina. Will you undertake it?"

The woman discreetly moved away, saying she would watch at the entrance. The girl again looked me straight in the face with her lovely half-sad eyes. I had not supposed I should make love to her to-day—had hardly expected the opportunity, in fact. But we seldom can make our opportunities for love-making and it might be a good while before I should see her thus, alone, again."

"Undertake to teach you of girls and women? Nay, Signor, that is a lesson for men to learn by themselves, without instruction, from the alphabet-blocks themselves. I am only one block—one letter."

"Let me learn that letter, then, and the rest may go hang."

She tried to draw away her hand, but I was holding it in both of mine, and two against one is superior force. She gave it up. It was a dear little warm hand.

"Signorina, let me know you. May I not come and see you at your home?"

She gave a frightened little jump.

"Come to our house!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Signor, you do not understand. My uncle will never allow that. I am never allowed to have company. Only old friends of the family."

"I can furnish good letters of introduction, Signorina."

"That will avail nothing. You do not understand, Signor."

I did understand, and was little surprised.

"Signorina, do you know I love you?"

She turned once more and looked me full in the face.

"Ah, Signor, that is so lightly said! You cannot mean it—yet!"

"I love you, Signorina, and I can never love anyone but you, now!"

"How long since you said that the last time? As much as a week?"

"I have never said it before, nor shall I ever say it again to anybody but you, Signorina."

"Ah, Signor, I did not expect this would go so far at our very first meeting. You must not talk to me of love—yet. You must better know what you are doing. You do not understand, Signor."

I did, or thought I did, and was burning to tell her so and to argue the possibility of managing her uncle. But of course any mention of her property at this first meeting was not to be thought of. It might have caused a misunderstanding that could never be remedied. For now I had to let it pass so.

"How am I to see you, then?"

"Our meetings will have to be stolen ones and we will have to be very secret. If my uncle were to find out that I met you here to-day he would put me into a convent, perhaps never to come out again."

She shivered.

"Signor, I have never looked at men before. Of course I know that men admire me and turn and look after me, but I have never cared enough before to risk uncle's anger."

"Have you ever been threatened with a convent?"

"Often!"

Yes, I told myself, I understood very well! Nor did I regard her fears as groundless. It would be a perfectly possible and practical means for old

Tomanovich to use. It has been done, often enough. Knowing her own situation as she did, this girl had run a serious risk indeed in meeting me. The thought was uplifting.

"Can you always depend upon your servant, there?"

"Oh, yes. Teresa was my nurse when I was a baby and has always been with me. She is a Morlach, but I do not fear her faithfulness an instant. She is more to me than a servant. She has been the one person in the world to whom I could go!"

"She can be our messenger, then."

"Certainly. But, Signor, never let any one in Cattaro see you address her!"

"I shall remember. Signorina, I shall at least try to come to your house. No, child, I mean as a regularly introduced guest who is not supposed ever to have seen you. I shall manage safely or not at all. But perhaps it will turn out that you are right and I cannot do so. In that case, as you say, our meetings must be stolen ones. Now we cannot risk many stolen meetings—I cannot see you every day or two that way, and, besides, the day will soon come when I must go back to Vienna. Well, then, Signorina, we must not unnecessarily waste the time we do have together. I have loved you from the first—from St. John's night when I saw you by the light of a beach fire. I want you to be my own little wife. Between the times we shall meet you must try to make up your mind if you can love me—and marry me. If you will be my wife then all will be well. Then we can defy anybody."

Her face went red and white by turns and her eyes grew wide and bright as she fairly drank in what was said. She looked me long in the eyes,

and gave me her other hand. Then her face went down and her figure seemed to droop. She sighed wearily.

"Oh, Signor, you do not understand. I will tell you how things are soon, but I haven't the heart to do it now. Also we have been here already too long. Ingenieur Overmann, who is to marry my cousin, and my uncle are coming over for Teresa and me, and they may have arrived. I must go now."

"Gisela, do you not have something—just one little word—to say to me—when I tell you I love you?"

Her head went down again. Silence.

"Not one—just one—little word?"

Her head remained down and her little boot nervously dug at the pavement.

"Alas, Signor, what shall I say? Shall I say I love you? I do not know yet if I do, and until I do know, that would be a lie."

Then she looked me frankly in the face.

"I ought to be married by now, Signor. I am twenty-one—yes, actually. I know I do not look it—and that is an old maid in Dalmatia. Nearly all of my girl friends are married. But I have never loved anybody yet, nor admired any man enough to make it worth while to defy my uncle. He, on his side, has never urged me to marry, nor tried to make a marriage for me as the fathers and mothers of my friends have done. You are the first man I have ever met without uncle's knowledge." (Here she drew away as far as her imprisoned hands would permit and looked at me from an averted face.) "I have risked much to come—no common risk, Signor. You may think I am talking only of the risk of a scolding and being shut

up as a bad girl for a day or two—but it is more than that. In coming here to meet you I have run a graver risk than you dream of. That is—an answer—to your love making, Signor. I cannot yet say I love you. But—I am here—and I—mean to come again; that is—if you—want me to."

But she suddenly wrested her hands loose before I could make good the intention which the witch surely read in my eye. She danced a few feet away and smilingly watched me.

"Signor, when you hold your arms out that way, you look like you were preparing to take a dive!"

I took a dive at her, but had not reckoned with her fleetness. I nearly caught her in the front corner of the church but she suddenly said in a tense whisper:

"Stop! There comes the priest!"

I looked around, but saw no one. Now she had reached the church door, and having joined her laughing duenna, was merrily waving me adieux. At the door she looked out, and then backward over her shoulder. Then the pretty hand waved me a kiss; and she was gone, leaving behind only the echoes of silvery laughter flying about among the tall columns of the empty cathedral.

CHAPTER VII

"Do you ever play the violin any more, Ed?"

The question came from Harry. We were sitting, two evenings later, under the oleanders in the garden of the Dojmi, after a long sight-seeing trip around the gulfs, which had consumed the entire day.

"You know very well, Harry, that, compared to you, I never played at all."

"Compared to me you played less, it is true. But I remember you as one of the better pupils of our old master at home. Do you remember the day you smashed your violin over my head?"

I laughed at the long-forgotten boyish quarrel.

"Yes! And I jolly well remember the licking the old Dutchman gave me for it, too!"

"You deserved it. A violin is not an instrument wherewith to break heads. Have you laid playing aside since then?"

"For some years. I still tried to play a little until I had to choose between it and medicine. And then violin playing had to go."

"Pity. A doctor ought to have at least one other interest besides medicine; then he would not have to choose between talking disgusting shop and being a clam when invited out to dinner."

I did not like this. We seldom do enjoy a home thrust, and I was still young enough in medicine to have some *esprit de corps*.

"Do the long-haired Johnnies never talk shop, then?"

"They are not all long-haired. Don't get huffy,

my son. Smooth your ruffled feathers with one of these good Montenegrin cigarettes. I saw the Ingenieur in town day before yesterday."

"Day before yesterday! At what time?"

"In the afternoon."

Now I remembered that Gisela had said he was coming over.

"How comes it you didn't mention this before?"

"Didn't know you would care specially. Besides I had forgotten the circumstance. Having your experience in mind, I did not give him a chance either to address or snub me."

"Where did you see him?"

"Coming out of the bank;—Sbutega's."

"Just what hour, Harry?"

"Why, what ails you, boy? Sometime between three and four o'clock."

I fell back in my chair, relieved. If he had been in the bank at that hour he had not been spying.

The possibility of the Ingenieur being a factor, or becoming one, in my affairs had occurred to me more than once. He was to marry the cousin who would inherit if Gisela did not. His interest was, therefore, involved, and unfavorably, in any future success on my part. I wondered, in passing, why he had not made up to Gisela herself. I could not estimate how far the property consideration went with him, but I assumed, from my knowledge of European marriages, that it was, probably, the principal factor. Of course, no more than myself, would he have the uncle's countenance in a suit for Gisela's hand, and I assumed that he had taken the next best chance, *i.e.*, Lubitza. Or had he really preferred Lubitza? There is no accounting for taste, and maybe she had appealed to him



more than Gisela. I could not solve the riddle. Still the combination troubled me, and I decided to acquaint Harry with all the facts, even including at least the circumstance that I had had an interview with Signorina Portulan. It would be better for Harry to know the whole thing.

He listened to my low-toned account of the conversation with the banker with all the attention I could have asked. He asked me a question or two, and then considered it, meanwhile drumming on the table and whistling between his teeth. Finally he said:

"I did not like this thing in the beginning, and I like it less now. But you have gone too far to retreat. I think this thing is going to end up in a jolly fight of some kind, and I am with you, my son. Just tell me in which alley it is to come off, and I'll be there."

I had not expected to make a convert of him.

"Glad to hear that, old boy!"

"Of course it would have been better not to have gone into this in the first place. But you are in now, and now it is a question of winning out. I'm with you,—anyway I can help."

We shook hands. Hardly the action ceased when we were hailed by a jovial voice.

"What ho! What solemn pact is being sealed?"

It was the Ingenieur. Harry and I both stood up, nonplussed. Not having expected such a contingency we had not provided for it. Harry was first to recover his presence of mind, though not without keeping the Ingenieur's extended hand waiting a perceptible interval. I bowed gravely without offering my hand, but as he extended his, there was nothing to do but take it with the best grace I could command.

"I saw you yesterday, Herr McClellan, but you were at a distance and I was in a hurry then. I inquired this morning if you came here and they told me you both were here every night. So I am here."

The words were jovially spoken, as was his wont. I almost believed he really had not seen me that day across the gulf.

"Ed saw you last week in Perzagno," remarked Harry.

I wished he had not mentioned it, but nothing else being possible, upon the Ingenieur's request, I related the circumstance. It only gave him a chance to put me in the wrong, which he promptly did.

"Well, well! I call that shabby of you, Herr Doktor! You must have seen that I did not see you. You could have spoken."

The retort was obvious, of course, but I refrained.

"It did not seem to be a favorable or fitting opportunity for doing so. You were very much engaged in conversation." I uttered the words pretty stiffly I think.

"Oh, you Americans are as bad as the English with your formalities and proprieties. An Austrian friend would not have allowed me to pass so. My attention *was* very much engaged just then, it is true; but I always have time for my friends, no matter how occupied, military duties alone excepted. Now I understand why you fellows were so stiff when I came up. Since I have offended, although unintentionally, I offer my best apologies, gentlemen."

Harry seemed convinced, besides, it would have been unmodern to have been behind him in cour-

tesy. Furthermore, I admitted to myself at once that I would have been convinced, were it not for his connection with my affair, and I argued that he, on his side, did not know of that yet. I ended by being partly convinced, and after a few moments the acquaintance of all three seemed to be on the old footing again. After another word or two of reproach leveled at me he explained himself.

"When I left you at Castel Nuovo I meant to go on to Ragusa next morning; but after landing I received news of the wedding of one of my friends at Dobrota, together with the word that further leave had already been obtained for me from Trebinje. That is how I come to be still here. In the past few days I have been kept busy by my fiancée's family. She lives in Perzagno. I was expecting to meet her and her father in Ragusa where I thought they were, but I found that they also had returned for the wedding. My fiancée was with me when you saw me, Herr Doktor."

"Ah! Now I understand why you could not see anybody else just then! Forgive my doubts of you!"

"Just so. Now all's well." And we shook hands again.

I put him down as a facile and accomplished dallier with the truth. I had not forgotten the backward look, full of curiosity with which his fiancée had favored me, nor the quick turning of her head when she saw me look up. And they were not conversing as they had passed me. But perhaps he meant all right now, and with that thought I sank the Perzagno incident.

"When are you to be married?" Harry asked.

"The date is not settled," he answered, brushing some ashes off of his uniform. "Probably some

time next year. My fiancée is still young—only nineteen, and has a fine voice. She wants to study singing and it is perhaps better that she try herself out at that before she marry.

"Has her voice a future?" asked Harry.

"It seems so. A famous Berlin professor was down here last year and said she would succeed in opera."

"You may lose her at that rate. She may wed her art."

"Better wed her art first," he answered imperturbably.

"Then you are going to give her the choice?"

"Certainly. It is better so. An artist is far better off single than married—at any rate, until success is gained. And if she have in her the making of an artist her suitor ought to be unselfish enough to stand aside—no matter how much he may want her. Art comes first."

"That is all true," said Harry.

"Yes. Besides, in this day and age, and above all, among artists it is not strictly necessary actually to marry if it be not convenient."

We risked no comment on this.

"What have you two been doing the past week?"

Harry gave him some account of ourselves.

"Montenegro! Pah! I am astonished that you wasted four whole days there! There are no pretty women in Montenegro! Besides, they have a disagreeable institution known as the vendetta."

"Well, there are pretty women down here, at least."

"Ho! So you have found them, have you, Sir Violinist? I was expecting to help you in that. Well, perhaps there are still some here you have

not seen yet. I know where the prettiest birds twitter here."

"Come, Herr Ober-Leutnant, you are trying to lead us astray."

"No fear. That was done in your grandfather's time I'll wager, Sir Violinist!"

"Well, your heritage goes still further back. We'll have no show while *you* are around!"

"Don't despair. There is no accounting for taste. Speaking of that, let me advise you. When you find a girl you want in Dalmatia, remember that the women here like to be courted by a *man;* not by another woman in men's clothes. Your high and knightly fol-de-rols, soft speaking and prating about honor will be lost on her. She will be won by a man who is direct in his methods and who will not wait for a yes or no—who literally *takes* her. She would rather elope than marry regularly, any time. And now, gentlemen, I must be going. Before I go, I want you to set a date when you can come over to luncheon. I bear an invitation for you from my prospective father-in-law. When can you come? To-morrow?"

Again Harry and I stared at one another, and again it was Harry who first recovered himself. After some discussion, the following day, Thursday, was set for our coming, and we accompanied the Ingenieur to his barque. We watched him out of sight on the moonlit gulf, and answered his jaunty salutes as long as we could see them. Harry turned on me.

"I say, Ed, this doesn't chime with *your* tale!—not a little bit!"

"I have to admit it! Of all unexpected things, that invitation was a bolt from the bluest blue!"

"Well, you may have your chance now—and the right way."

"We shall see. Harry, what do you make of it? I am completely in a fog."

He thought it over.

"Why, after all, it seems simple enough. The Ingenieur and his prospective father-in-law know nothing, as yet, about your infatuation for Miss Portulan, nothing about your having met her, and therefore, see no more risk in inviting us to the house, than would be the case with any other people. And the Ingenieur wishes to pay us a courtesy. Then, added to that, maybe they mean to keep Miss Portulan out of sight during our visit. You noticed that the Ingenieur never once mentioned her."

"But I know perfectly well that he *did* see me that day, Harry."

"If you are right, then this change of front would be very curious," said Harry, thoughtfully, "but I think he didn't see you. It was natural, wasn't it, that his attention would be engaged rather with his fiancée than by some fellow sitting by the roadside?"

"Admittedly. But how about her backward look?"

"It might have been mere curiosity, and her turning her head when you looked up may have been a mere chance. Who shall say when a woman's head shall be turned?"

"Who, indeed!" I answered, laughing.

"Also, perhaps the banker has spoken a good word for you. The Ingenieur was in there Monday, you remember."

"No, that isn't it. Before he speaks for me, the

banker will wait until he sees my letters, so that he will have something to quote."

"Well, we can wait and see. Meanwhile, yo have obtained the very thing you wanted. Don look your gift-horse too closely in the mouth. Yo can try his gaits and if you don't like him you ca jump off again."

Which shows how Harry had "flopped."

CHAPTER VIII

DURING my previous visit to Perzagno I had not dared to ask where Signor Tomanovich lived, but had inferred that his residence would be near Le Tre Sorelle. This might have been any one of several large or medium sized houses within a quarter of a mile. I was therefore surprised to find that he lived in an unpretentious but commodious and comfortable looking villa well up on the hillside, rather in Donji Stolivo (lower Stolivo) than in Perzagno itself, and rather far away from the old triple house. So had I haunted Perzagno, for a sight of Gisela, I would have had my trouble for my pains.

The Ingenieur had come over for us. As we ascended the pathway to the villa we saw the elder Tomanovich and a young man coming down to meet us.

Notwithstanding all prejudices the old man impressed me favorably at once. He seemed to have attended the same old school of courtesy with the banker. Honor us, he did, as he met us, hat in hand, and made a stately bow. He also was a very hale old man, older than Signor Sbutega, probably, but well kept and vigorous. He was, however, distinctly a Slav—a Servian, having little Italian blood. The young man following him was his son, as we were to learn. This young man was, as men go, a handsome human being. For the moment, I had no further opportunity for analysis.

The Ingenieur made the introductions, speaking in German.

"Ah, Herr Doktor Ransome, delighted to have you honor my poor house. And this is the violinist who will fascinate us all some day? Herr—M—M—. Ah, that name is *very* difficult. You are both young and I am an old man. I shall beg the privilege of using your given names. What is yours, Signor?"

"Henry. But my good friends call me Harry. I beg you to use the same version with my other good friends, Signor."

"Harry. Thank you, Signor. And yours, Herr Doktor? E-du-ard? Ah, we hear that one among Europeans. I hope I shall have frequent occasion to use these names, in my own house, and for years to come. But, Signori, forgive me for keeping you standing in the heat. Paulo, go on into the house and call the ladies and we will follow."

So it was not to be a bachelor party, then. He could scarcely have the face to keep one of them upstairs. I was relieved at once.

"Where have you studied, Signor Harry? In Belgium? By the way, we have a curious old family heirloom which will be sure to interest you—but more of that later" (turning to me). Are you also a musician? No, I remember. You are a follower of Galen. A noble profession—when in noble hands—and in you I am sure it will have a pillar which will be both support and ornament. You have an earnest face."

"Faces were made to conceal character, Signor."

"Ah, Doktor Eduard, you have adapted that quotation slightly."

"Signor Tomanovich, I see at once that you have been a wide reader. How many languages do you speak?"

"In this part of Europe all busy people must be more or less acquainted with a half dozen tongues. In my young days we Dalmatians were still trying to get wealth by way of the sea, though the gala times for that had long passed. All I have left of those days is a practiced speaking apparatus."

"What does 'gutes Mundwerk' mean, Ed?" asked Harry in English.

"It corresponds to 'gift of gab'."

"Justa so," said the old man, "gift-a gab."

"Well, it stands many in good stead."

"It has served *me* well. After you, gentlemen!"

We had come to the entrance of the long low house, of two stories and a basement. Having ascended the short flight of steps leading to a long wide veranda, we entered the house. A young woman came to meet us, and I recognized Lubitza, the Ingenieur's fiancée.

After all, I had to admit that she was a comely girl. She would suffer only by comparison with such a royal beauty as her cousin. Her figure, in its way, and her carriage were fully as fine, but her face was pretty more by reason of youthfulness and fine health than by its lines. Her eyes were not round and level but almost Oriental in type. Of their sort the eyes were fine. The chief fault in her face lie in a certain heaviness of that part between the cheek bones and the angle of the jaw which made her forehead seem too narrow—a fact due no doubt to her preponderance of Servian blood. But her color was brilliant—as much so as that of her cousin, and, too, there was a certain curious fleeting resemblance between them, only to be seen at one or two angles of view, although her face had not the lovely regularity of her



cousin's. However, she was handsome, and I could see how a man like the Ingenieur, whose taste would be rather for an animal than an intellectual type of womanly comeliness might prefer her to Gisela. I was not sorry. She also gave us a warm greeting and seemed to look at me with some curiosity.

"I have seen you before, Herr Doktor Ransome. You were buried in a book or something by the roadside."

"Quite right, Signorina. I remember you better still."

"Doctor, it is not memory of us that we women prize; we always hope rather for a not forgetting."

"The last is more significant?" asked Harry. "Well, that always lies with the woman, it seems to me. She cannot control our remembering—but the not forgetting requires a little encouragement."

"Well, Signor McClaylan, I shall now learn, at last, if I have any power. For if I have, I shall see you very often."

"I say," said the Ingenieur, jovially, "that won't do. This is my fiancée."

"I apologize."

"Don't," said the girl. "It is only a temporary arrangement. Herr Ober-Leutnant is engaged to four or five girls. I am going to be engaged to at least ten men during the coming year. Gentlemen, my mother."

I had just presence of mind to remember to kiss the old lady's hand, for just behind her stood Gisela. It was a difficult moment for us both. I must look at her just enough, and not too much, as this supposedly first meeting justified.

Happily, there was not much pause, and still less observation, though Paulo eyed us both as

we shook hands. The bringing in of very welcome and tempting ices gave us an occupation at once. Harry had not seen Gisela up to this time, and as I caught his expressive eye, I read approval there. He managed to say in an undertone, "At last I understand."

Much to my relief, the mother appropriated me at once. She was a rather hard featured, very quiet woman, and I found it difficult to talk to her, the more as she spoke but little German, and my French was very lame. That, however, helped to cover my embarrassment, so I cheerfully did my best.

"Luncheon will be ready in about an hour," she informed me. Then she addressed Gisela in Italian, and the girl disappeared.

"I have told my niece to see if the luncheon is going on all right. Have you seen something of the gulfs, Herr Doktor?"

My embarrassment would not leave me. All were so jolly and kind that I felt guilty of an underhanded proceeding. I wished I had not met Gisela until this occasion. I was finding myself ashamed of my suspicions of the family and it was only by constantly calling to mind the earnest words of the banker and the fears of Gisela herself that I could keep these suspicions alive, or find any justification for my present position. For according to Austrian law Gisela was still a minor by fully three years; therefore her guardian was still responsible for her. Surely, as her guardian, it had been his duty to keep her, an heiress, out of reach of adventurers, even to the length of threatening a "convent." I was sure any disinterested person would see the matter in that light. True, I had done no harm. I had proposed marriage to

her, and there is nothing dishonorable in that, to ever so young a girl. But I wished it were to do over again—here.

But Lubitza called a halt to these meditations. A tiny bouquet struck me in the face.

"Why so thoughtful, Herr Doktor? Are you making a diagnosis?"

"No, Signorina, rather conning a remedy."

"I hope the trouble is not serious," she mocked.

"I'll take the first dose now," and I pinned the nosegay on the lapel of my coat.

"Very good," said the old man. "The Doctor knows the flowers and plants from which our healing as well as much of our pleasure comes."

"Our remedies do not all come from plants," interposed the Ingenieur. "Perhaps he needs an animal extract."

"He doesn't look like he needed anything," said Lubitza. "Herr Doktor, do you live in Vienna?"

"Yes, Signorina—for the present."

"I shall go there soon—we'll dance together."

"My daughter is a very naughty girl," said the mother. "Herr Doktor, if you would pray for a great good, pray that you may never have daughters to bring up."

Lubitza sprang up, gathered her mother in her arms, and willy-nilly waltzed a step with her. The Ingenieur saved the table from an upset. The father caught both wife and daughter in his arms and kissed them. Then, still holding the mother in his arms, he dramatically said:

"Gentlemen, I married this woman over thirty years ago. I have always been satisfied!"

It was a pretty compliment, and the mother's immobile Slav face grew rosy. At this moment Gisela came in and announced luncheon. She gave

me a smile, but as her glance fell upon the nosegay the smile faded. She turned and left the room.

"Oh-o, Miss Jealousy!" called out Lubitza.

We filed out into the next room where the table was set. Gisela leaned out of a window and plucked a rosebud. Then she came to me.

"Take off those weeds and put on this!" she commanded.

"Herr Doktor, don't you *dare!*" screamed Lubitza.

"If you don't, I'll never look at you again!"

"Doktor, if you do, we'll not dance together in Vienna!"

"I'll take both!"

"No, no!" all screamed in unison. "That won't do at all!"

All stood around ready to burst with laughter, looking to see what I would do about it.

"Choose!"

"I'll take both, or neither."

"Ah, I have been sure all along that he had Turkish blood."

"That must have been the attraction," said Gisela. Then to Lubitza: "Well, *take* your Turk!" And she threw the rosebud out of the window. "Where is your harem?" she asked me.

"In my heart."

"Crowded quarters I fancy—especially if the many there quarrel!"

"Ah," said the Ingenieur, "there are four rooms in it, and by the law of the Prophet he may have four wives. It is well."

"Stop annoying the Doctor! Let us be seated."

The old gentleman showed me the chair on his right. Harry was given the mother's right hand. Lubitza took the chair on her mother's left, and



the Ingenieur at the father's left. Thus there were two empty places in the middle of each side. Gisela had left the room.

"My son begs you to excuse him, gentlemen. He has an imperative engagement at Perzagno, but will return as soon as possible."

So now I wondered if Gisela would sit beside me. Evidently yes, as the Ingenieur moved away the empty chair on his side and moved nearer to Harry. But when she appeared the next moment, she only glanced at the empty chair on my side, then drew back the chair which the Ingenieur had removed, and seated herself between him and Harry. The pretty red under lip was pouting.

All laughed. Lubitza promptly pulled away the empty chair between us and moved up to me.

"Come nearer, Doctor. I am more fascinating than father,—besides, we can converse more confidentially."

"Beware of her, Herr Doktor!" warned the Ingenieur with a grin.

I saw that Gisela was really angry. It behooved me to be careful. It was too soon, and my situation too precarious with her as yet, to have a lover's quarrel. It would not do to go too far with the possessor of that firm little mouth—at least not until I should have more hold upon her. I took off the tiny boutonniere and threw it at her. Lubitza promptly rapped my knuckles soundly with a fork handle.

"Daughter!" exclaimed the mother.

"I warned you!" quoth the Ingenieur.

"Bah! The Doctor and I will get along all right. I'll wager he'll wear my flowers in Vienna without throwing them away! He'll press them in a book."

Harry was smiling half cynically. I wished they

would turn on him awhile. But the first part of a delicious little luncheon had been deftly served, and we all found ourselves hungry.

"This wine is from Lissa, Herr Doktor, but has been many years in the cask," the old man informed me.

"It tastes like a fine Beaujolais," I remarked.

"Yes. The Lissa wines season well. Here in Dalmatia we hope, some day, to supplant the French wines in large part. Already we send thousands of barrels to Marseilles and much of the wine within a French label, for which milord pays twelve or fifteen francs the bottle, was pressed out right here in Dalmatia. We have no vine pests here yet."

"Yes, all seems to be strong and well in Dalmatia. I believe you could stand on your head like a boy, Signor."

"Oh, I can. I'll do it after dinner if you like."

"He is worse than that," said the Ingenieur. "I wouldn't care to stand up against him with bare steel."

"Nor I with bare fists."

"Now, boys, don't waste your flattery. Turn it on the ladies where it will count for something."

Gisela was very quiet. She had laughed lightly when I had thrown the bouquet but had not smiled afterward. I tried to catch her eye but she was talking to Harry. I turned to Lubitza.

"Herr Ober-Leutnant tells me that you really are going to Vienna to study opera."

"Yes, for a year, to see what I can do. Shall we see one another there?"

"Oh, I hope so, Signorina! Otherwise, I shall be disappointed indeed. With whom are you going to study?"

Thus our conversation drifted upon a safe subject for she was an enthusiast in music. Harry was soon attracted and joined in, the mother being an interested listener. I saw that Gisela spoke but little with the Ingenieur, answering him shortly, when he addressed her. His debonair manner was unaffected by that, however. After a little he began a discussion with the father about some Austrian political situation. Now Gisela must talk to me, and forgetful of dainty chicken sandwiches I began.

"Are you a musician, too, Signorina?"

"No, although I love music—especially singing."

"Why do you not go up to Vienna, too? You could go with your cousin."

"I have no object there, Signor," she replied, coldly.

"There is much in Vienna besides music, Signorina. It is a gay city."

"I know little of balls and parties, Herr Doktor, and do not believe I shall ever care for such things."

"But there is so much in Vienna! Do you not think of one—one single thing you might care for there?"

She gave me a warning glance. Perhaps fortunately for us both there was a diversion at this point. A visitor was announced. He proved to be a priest of the Servian-Orthodox church—a very large, fine looking man who was introduced as "Padre Petrus." Signor Tomanovich brought him to the table. From now on the conversation was of little interest to me, and I was glad when the meal was ended, and we repaired once more to the drawing-room.

I did not know if Harry did it purposely, but I

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was grateful to him for taking possession of Lubitza, the which he did at once. The mother disappeared and Signor Tomanovich and the priest retired to a private room. After some moments the Signor appeared and beckoned to the Ingenieur, who excused himself. Lubitza and Harry went to the piano and began to leaf over music. Gisela had seated herself in an overhanging window and I joined her.

"Signorina, are you angry with me?"

"Almost. You just saved yourself by throwing away those weeds!"

"If I could believe you were jealous of me, I'd be the happiest man in Austria, now!"

"Be happy then. But it is not only that, there is more behind the matter."

"Of course I see you do not love your cousin, dear."

"I have reason not to love her, Signor. There has ever been strife between us. If I am ever to love you, Signor, I warn you I will not bear with any flirting with my cousin! You will have to choose, right now, between us."

"That will not take me long. But is not Lubitza to marry Herr Ober-Leutnant Overmann?"

"Oh, that is nothing. Lubitza will always please herself, and above all, will always try to take away from me, if she can, no matter whether she really cares for the thing or not."

"She cannot do that with me, darling."

"Be careful, Herr Doktor—here. In this house one never knows who may be listening. You were not careful at table. Don't be deceived by their cordiality."

"It seems real enough. I have taken a real liking to your uncle."

"My uncle is not a bad man at heart, but he loves his own children best; and my cousin has him under her thumb."

"Well, I love them all—for having left us alone together."

"Nor do I understand that, Herr Doktor. It has never happened before. And they had seated me next to you! If you knew what lies behind the scenes here, you would wonder, as I do!"

Her eyes were wide, and she glanced about, half fearfully, like a child that has been placed in joke upon a high piece of furniture and left there.

I determined to tell her I did know of her situation, suppressing the banker's name, of course. I saw that Lubitza and Harry were about to sing and play together, as Harry had seated himself at the piano. It would be no place for talking in a moment.

"Let us prove the thing, Signorina. Let us go somewhere alone, and see if they interrupt us."

Her little mouth became firm again. She rose, and we sauntered out onto the long veranda. We walked slowly to the other end, and seated ourselves in wicker chairs. It was still hot, and she drew down a screen with which the veranda was fitted. Realizing that an interruption might come any moment, I decided to waste no time.

"Signorina, I love you and want you to be my wife. Therefore, I think there should be no chance left for any misunderstanding between us. Also, perhaps I can help you. I loved you at that first sight on St. John's evening—my friend will tell you so, for we have been good friends since boyhood and I keep only very private matters from him. At that time I did not know what or who you were, and yet resolved to know and win you.



But, Signorina, in trying to find out who you were and a way to your acquaintance, by chance I came across a person who knew all about you and who fully explained the situation between you and the family here. I know about your great-grandmother, Albina Portulan, and about the curious will she left. I know that if you break a cardinal rule of the Church before you are twenty-four years old you will lose your estates, and will have left only that curious old house in Perzagno. In such a case your estates are to go to your cousin."

She was prettier than ever in her amazement.

"Who told you these things, Signor?"

"I am pledged not to repeat the name. I'll ask him to let me tell you."

"No matter, Signor. What further did he tell you?"

"Why—that was all. Is there more?"

"Did he tell you there was once a larger estate?"

"Oh, yes. He mentioned that, but said it was lost with Albina Portulan's death."

"Yes. You have been well informed!"

"I did not seek this information, Signorina. It only came by chance along with my search for a way to come to you." I said this a little stiffly.

She glanced about, and then laid her hand on mine and pressed it. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Don't misunderstand me, Signor. I little wish to hurt the one friend I have in the world!"

I raised the hand to kiss it. She fearfully drew it back.

"Careful, Signor! God knows who may be watching us!"

There was a closed door not far from us. She rose and opened it, looking about inside. Then, leaving the door wide open, she resumed her seat.



"This corner is my bedroom," she said.

"Tell me about Albina Portulan. I have part of her history, but not all," and I repeated what the priest at Perasto and the banker had told me, somewhat softened, of course, as to particulars. She listened smilingly.

"You have heard almost all that any of us know," she said, after I had finished. "You see she lived much over a century ago, and most of her life has been forgotten. She was a gay woman when young; my grandfather was ah—ah"——

"Illegitimate. Yes, I was told that, too. Like wine, that only needs the ageing to make it an asset. Also I was told that Albina did not marry the father of your grandfather."

"Yes, it was so. The real father of my grandfather was a haiduch and a violinist whom my great-grandmother loved while still a girl. He lost his life and left her his violin. Her father would not allow them to marry."

Her face was lit by the glow of the afternoon sun shining through the red cloth screen, and she looked like some eastern princess, as her head lay back on the chair.

"Is it known what became of this violin?"

"Oh, yes. We have it now. It was mentioned in her will and is to go to her who shall inherit Le Tre Sorelle. This and one or two other things have been handed down in the family."

"Is it a fine instrument?"

"They say the workmanship is very fine but that it has a broken heart. It has a dreadful tone and is utterly worthless."

"Has no repair ever been attempted?"

"They say it is not worth while. The tone is too bad."

"Most singular! You say the workmanship is fine?"

"Yes. I'll get it for you. It is here in my room. You can see for yourself, Signor."

She was gone a moment and returned with it. The case seemed heavy.

The case was within a thick velvet-lined canvas bag. Removing this, revealed a rosewood box of the usual shape, but magnificently carved. The workman who had done that carving and decorating had worked for love of his art and not for money. The case alone would have commanded practically any price from the lover of an antiquity.

The case was not locked. I opened it, drew out the violin and examined it with great interest. To even the most inexperienced eye there was no doubt of the workmanship. Only one key was left and the tailpiece and bridge were missing—otherwise it seemed in perfect order. I looked through the *f*-hole but the label was gone. The varnish from scroll to end-pin was wholly original and intact save only along the E side of the finger-board, where a little had been scratched away. The general proportions were of enchanting grace. It delighted my eyes more and more every instant I looked at it, not only by reason of the beauty of its lines, but as well on account of the lovely old golden brown color and beautiful figuring in the wood of the back. I viewed it from every angle and could not tire of the sight. For the moment I forgot everything else in the world.

The silver laugh recalled me.

"Now, Doctor Ransome, I have discovered your real love at last!"

"Signorina, not my foremost one, but I admit

you will have to let me bow down before this beautiful violin a little."

"Do you know, Signor, that just now your face looked like that of some devotee in rapt prayer before a favorite chapel. Is it so very fine then?"

"Signorina, there is nothing more beautiful in the violin world! This is just as much a work of art as a Madonna by Raphael or the finest work of a Praxiteles. It is something to worship!"

She laughed joyously.

"Signor, it is yours! It would be unpardonable to keep such a lover and his sweetheart apart! Keep it always."

I stared at her, only half comprehending.

"It is yours, Doctor," she said more soberly.

"What! Do you really *give* it to me?"

"Certainly, Doctor Ransome. The gift is of small value, I assure you. It has no tone."

"But will your uncle not object?"

"Oh, no! Rest assured of that. True, it is supposed to be a part of the estate, but I have always been allowed to claim it as my very own. It is worthless, so nobody else wanted it," she concluded bitterly.

"But aside from tone it is an heirloom and together with that case is a beautiful antique. Do you not care for it at all?"

"Nothing like you evidently do. Take it Edu—, Signor. Give me the pleasure of having done something to please you."

I had caught the half uttered name and forgot the violin now.

"You not only please but delight me every moment I am with you, Gisela. Thank you, dear little girl. I shall never, as long as I live, part with it to any other hand but your own. I wish you would

give me yourself along with the violin. Then all three could be together. Can't you love me, dear?"

"Don't, Signor. I am afraid. Besides we have been here too long already. Let us go. We have proved that no one will interrupt us, have we not?" Again she smiled.

"It seems so, but we can't know that it will occur so again. Let me talk to you one moment more. If you will only say you love me, I'll go to your uncle and ask for you."

Her eyes and mouth opened in genuine fright and she held out her arms imploringly.

"Oh, Doctor! Whatever mad thing you do or think of, don't—do—that!"

"Courage—courage—little girl,—I'll do nothing of the sort without your permission. Calm yourself. When am I to see you again after this afternoon?"

She was still trembling.

"I—I—don't think it can be—sooner than Monday night. There is to be a military ball in Cattaro that evening. I do not know yet if I am to go, but Lubitza is going and the rest will go with her. If I go you will see me there. Perhaps they will let us alone there, also, for a little while. If I be not there, come over here about ten o'clock. I will send Teresa out into the road to meet you, and when you arrive she will come and bring me."

I did not object to this arrangement. If they could find it in their hearts not to allow Gisela to go when Lubitza did, I would feel conscience-free in coming to her here.

"Has Lubitza been singing, Signorina—I have heard nothing."

"You were too much engaged in violin-worship. Yes, she only stopped a few moments ago."



I had not heard a single note! I was spared the need of a social lie, however, for when we re-entered the drawing-room, we found that Paulo as well as the rest were there. The priest had departed. We entered amidst chatter and found places. The old man noticed the violin.

"I see, Doctor, that Gisela has shown you the old heirloom."

Harry looked up.

"Yes,—Doctor Ransome was so delighted with it that I have given it to him, uncle."

"Oh, pshaw! The thing is worthless—only a piece of old lumber. Give him the little jeweled stiletto which was among your great-grandmother's things."

"The violin is beautiful and the case ought to be in some museum," I said. "It is too much of a present to accept."

"Bah! If you really like it, I am glad my niece gave it to you. Take it with a thousand welcomes, Herr Doktor. But you will be disappointed. It has no tone and is only a curious thing. Did you tell the Doctor its history, Gisela?"

"Oh, yes."

Harry, all eagerness, had the violin out. When he saw it his jaw fell, and he stared at me, green with envy.

"Why! This is a *masterpiece! No tone,* did you say?"

"No, Signor Harry. Several fine players at different times have tried it, and all say it is worthless. Some think it was one one of the failures or mistakes of a great maker. Others say it probably once had tone, but now has a broken heart."

Harry turned the violin about in his hands.

"Yes," he said, sadly. "I know of another such

a one—a Joannes Baptiste Guadagnini, which my former master in Brussels has. It has been put in the hands of the best makers again and again. They have never been able to find anything wrong with it, and the workmanship is Guadagnini's best. But like this one, it has no tone. I suppose some minute crack or some little spot or streak of softening in a vital spot, or some strain in the wood, coming on in the settling of the parts through time, accounts for such cases. But what royal workmanship! What a magnificent shaping! Oh—it is—*too, too*—bad!"

"I believe the violin never had tone," said Paulo. "I believe the old masters spoiled a good many violins in the making."

"It seems strange that they would go on and finish up a failure," I remarked.

"Oh, no, that is not strange at all," said Harry. "Much of the great worth of a master-violin depends upon the very varnish itself. Therefore the makers probably never quite knew what a piece of work would be until it was entirely finished up. The secret of the varnish they used was lost with their other secrets. Today, if one of these old masterpieces be re-varnished, it is ruined; so re-varnishing is never attempted on a fine old instrument, no matter how it looks."

"Perhaps that is what is the matter with this one," suggested the old man.

"Oh, no. This is the original varnish, throughout. Besides, re-varnishing does not destroy the tone. It only reduces the tone quality to that of a common but first-class modern instrument."

"Oh, this is worse than that!" said Paulo, "it makes your hair stand on end to hear it."



Harry returned the violin to its case.

"Well, Ed, you must let me string it up and try it to-morrow.

It did not much matter to me whether it had tone or not. It was a gift from Gisela and was intimately connected with her history. It would be my companion for the rest of my life unless she should want it again. Besides, in its way, it was her match in beauty.

The afternoon was waning and Harry and I took our leave amid many repeated invitations to visit them soon again. As we started down the walk, Lubitza called out:

"Are you going to the ball Monday night?"

"Have not heard of it," called back Harry.

"Oh, you must both go. I'll see that you get cards. We'll all be there," called out the Ingenieur.

Paulo accompanied us to our barque. After we were seated I turned and looked him up and down. He was certainly good to look at with his trim athletic figure and large gray eyes. The latter he took from his mother and his face, like hers, was expressionless as he talked.

After we were off shore a way, Harry said:

"That fellow would make an A1 poker player. He could hold four aces or a four flush with one and the same expression on his face. By the way, Ed, before I forget it, I want to mention a little occurrence you did not see. I would have been completely deceived today if it had not been for this thing. As it is, it may not mean anything, but I don't like it. After you and Signorina Portulan left the room after luncheon, Signorina Lubitza and I were trying over some songs—by the way, Ed, she has *a voice!* Did you hear her out there? Well,

you missed something worth while! Well, I was playing her accompaniments. It so happened that that cheval mirror in the drawing room was so placed that I could look into it and see the outside door behind me. While I was playing, I saw that old priest come out on tip-toe, go to the door and take a long look down the veranda in your direction. I think he must have been looking at you. Then he tip-toed back into the room he had come from."

"Did Lubitza see it?"

"I don't know. She was singing but did not break off."

"Wants to know me when he sees me again perhaps."

"I have that impression. He was looking at you all right! And careful that I should not see him do it. It shows, too, that you, or we, were being discussed in that room. I wonder if Tomanovich means to let you have her?"

"Have who? Oh, Signorina Gisela. Well, it looks favorable for me today."

"You were given a clear field, certainly—and very cordially invited to come again. If you find the Signorina at the ball, and you are again given a clear field, I think you can conclude that he expects you to ask for her, at least. That is the Italian custom, Ed,—exactly."

"That would mean that he has concluded to give up the estate. I have my doubts!"

"Oh, I have not suggested so much. I only say that he will expect you to *ask*. His answer is another matter. We cannot possibly forecast that. But keep your eyes peeled for that old priest. If I have any sense, there was no good in that tip-toeing!"



"I'll watch for him. What do you think of Lubitza?"

"A talented little devil!" he answered.



CHAPTER IX

HARRY rose betimes the next morning, purchased missing strings, fittings, a sound-post lever, and tried out the violin. I have never seen a human being so torn between admiration and regret as Harry was after, having polished and otherwise freshened up the old instrument, he at last drew bow across it. Of all the melancholy wails I had ever heard, this was the weirdest and most nerve racking. It did not sound like a cheap violin—there was an indefinable something in the tone that proclaimed the aristocrat. It made me think of the thin, tired, hollow, forced and interrupted accents of some old noble lying upon his death-bed.

Harry sat down, hunched up on a chair with his elbows on his knees, and contemplated the instrument long and sadly. Finally he drew a long breath and placed the violin and bow in the case. Then he mused over it again, fingering the violin absently. At last he sighed once more and stood up.

"It's no good for playing and never will be. Don't waste money trying to have it fixed up. But no piece of sculpture nor no great painting came to us from a greater artist than did this violin. Always keep it, Ed. If you get tired of having it kicking about, sell it to me. It ought to be in friendly hands for the sake of what it once was."

"Oh, I'll keep it—never fear! It was given to me by the Signorina."

"Keep it strung up and looking decent, too. The

Venus de Milo is broken, but she is given a pedestal and a place of honor!"

"Do you think it once had tone? Is it a Strad?"

"Yes, it once had tone—there is one place, high up on the A and E strings where it is still good, though weak. That case alone was never made for a toneless violin. I think it is not a Stradivarius, at least not Antonius. It is no Amati. I think it came from the hand of one of the other great makers. Hum! See! The sharp edges formed by the coming together of the flare of the sides, are blackened. That recalls something—Hum! I ca-a-n't remember—well, Ed, put it away! I can't look at it any longer!"

That morning I packed the instrument and case in voluminous wrappings and shipped it to Vienna, to my rooms.

In settling with the spediteur I noticed that my funds were running low and immediately repaired to the bank to make a draft. After the usual transaction was completed the cashier informed me that Signor Sbutega had asked to see me when I should come in. I was again ushered into his office. He cordially gave me his hand.

"Well, Doctor Ransome, how does the affair progress?"

"Unexpectedly well, so far, Signor. Am I indebted to you for some smooth sailing?"

"I mentioned you to the Herr Ingenieur and Signor Tomanovich. Perhaps that has helped somewhat."

"My best thanks, Signor. I did not know of this before, as not having received my letters yet, I was not expecting your kindness."

"Oh, we have the telegraph, Signor, and I have

a special agent in my correspondent's bank in Vienna. I had him report on you, and after that report nothing further was necessary. I have quite done my duty by my friend, Signor Tomanovich."

"Ah, Signor. I see that a banker's arm is long!"

"Or rather, his web has many long threads. It must be so, Doctor, or he wouldn't be long in business. Well, I congratulate you, Doctor. Signorina Portulan is a beautiful woman, and as fine as she is beautiful. I shall hope, some day not far off, to be invited to your wedding."

"Oh, that is still far enough away. My success consists only in having been permitted to make her acquaintance."

"Courage. Things that are worth while usually take more or less time. Signor, I wonder if I may entreat a very great favor of you? One that will lay certain persons under great obligations? Obligations which they will cheerfully repay should the opportunity offer?"

"Certainly, Signor."

"First hear what it is. Are you intending to go into Montenegro again?"

"Ah! Is there a return message?"

"You have guessed it. It would be very easy. You have only to go to Cettinje, and after nightfall, put the return packet where you found the first one. It is not necessary to exchange words with any person whatever, but merely to walk past the Prince's palace once during the hour between four and five in the afternoon before the evening on which you deliver the packet to its place."

"Shall I go tomorrow?"

"Oh, no. You can do it at your own convenience —next week—the week after,—as you please. I



only ask to know the morning of the day before you start."

"May I tell my friend?"

"Oh, yes,—with due cautions as to his discretion."

"Very well, Signor."

"Of course if you were not intending to go again"——

"I did not mean to, but it is a very little thing. I will do it cheerfully."

"A thousand thanks, Doctor! It is not a money-making affair or believe me, I would never ask it of you. And for the rest, if at any time in the future you ever need help in Austria send me the code message I shall give you when I give you the packet."

He opened a private strong room and disappeared within it, presently returning with a long sealed envelope.

"Be careful to allow no one to see this, Doctor. You may tell your friend of your errand, but keep this envelope in your own hands until you deliver it in the place you know of."

He wrote a line on a sheet of paper, placed the last in an envelope and sealed it. On the outside of the envelope he wrote "Codex—Cattaro."

"Here is the code message, Signor. Please never open the envelope unless you need me. If you ever do, use just the code message and add your then address only. You need not sign the message. Don't get the envelopes mixed, and deliver the wrong one in Cettinje. Lock the packet in a safe place until you are ready to start. The morning before you start send me an ordinary note asking me to remit to you at Ragusa. I shall understand."

He thanked me warmly and bowed me out. I

could go to Cettinje one morning and come back the next, and it was not much of a sacrifice for Signor Sbutega, who had served me so well.

That afternoon I received a message from Gisela. As I left the hotel after luncheon I saw Teresa walking past. She gave me one quick look and passed on. She led me into an unfrequented street and turned. As I came up, she said:

"The Signorina will be at the ball." Then she fled away.

I was sincerely glad, and prepared to enjoy the following two days in good spirits.

The morning following I received a note from the Ingenieur arranging to meet us at the Dojmi that evening. Harry had gone to Budua, but was back in good time, and the hour mentioned found us under Enrico's ministrations in our accustomed place. The Ingenieur was late, but came at last.

"Well, how did the fiddle turn out?"

"Oh, just as you said. But I am delighted to have it, nevertheless. Are all of you coming to the ball?"

"Yes, every one. I have your cards here. They have got your name wrong, Signor McClellan, but that is your father's fault. You must have it changed before you have your debut. You can go and live in Hungary for a few weeks, declare yourself a resident, and take any fine new name you please. It is a trick employed by our Hebrew friends when their names are too bad. An artist must have an artistic name."

"Time enough to name the dish when it is set before me."

"No—no! In this instance name it first. There is success and failure in a name—in art, at least. By the way, Doctor, my fiancée has taken a great

fancy to you. She won't talk of any other subject."

"We must stop that! I have no liking for the field of honor."

"No fear! On the contrary, when wedded bliss begins to pall, I may find you a great convenience. Besides, she is going to Vienna, and I shall be in Trebinje and I shall not know what happens."

"It is easy to see that you are sure of your fiancée, Herr Ober-Leutnant!"

"Not a bit of it! To tell the truth, I don't more than half expect she will marry me. I think she will go on the stage."

"Are you not in love with her?"

"Ah—love! And what is that? A little rift of sunshine peeping through the shadows. A seeming reality today, an amusing memory tomorrow. With some a sentiment, with others a pastime, and with still others a passion, but of various sorts. A business for boys and women, but for men a mere amusement, which no more than any other amusement must be allowed to hinder their work, or cause them to take one step aside from the pursuit of their object in life. What? Is my whole happiness in life to drag behind the whimsical and uncertain skirts of a woman? Only a fool allows that—the sort of fool who for years rides one old hack when he can buy a fresh young horse every season? Nay—nay! We do not pluck a rose and keep it and try to find perfume in it after it is withered and dry. Gentlemen, the fool of fools, the double-dyed in the wool and triple extract fool of the world, is the man who lets a woman spoil his life!"

In the mouths of some men such a speech would have meant past or present bitterness; but in his case I was sure it was simply his creed.

"What do you think of that, Harry?"

"Oh, I don't know much about women. For me they are only, sometimes, companions in art. But I agree with the Ingenieur, so far, that there is no use letting a woman spoil one's life."

"As a physician, I have reason to believe that we spoil their lives more often than they do ours."

"Oh, you have shot wide of the mark, Doctor," said the Ingenieur. "I was thinking only of the psychological side."

"The one leads into the other,—the psychological into the physical, and vice versa,—even as cause and effect."

"Argue as you please and hold what beliefs you like, but at least recognize one cardinal fact, for which any man who really knows women can vouch, and that is, that every woman *wants* to be spoiled, as you term it. The man who is regarded by them as a namby-pamby (have I got that word right, Doctor?) and who goes through life more their victim and dupe than any other, is the idiot who sets women up as angels and worships them as something purer and better than himself. If he does this, she will act the part—for him; but not among his friends and acquaintances when he is not by! And among them, she will laugh at and deride him for doing it, too. As to the fact that she wants to be spoiled, only watch her with a little intelligence and you are enlightened, at once. How often do you notice that as soon as a woman learns that a certain man is a rake, she is crazy to meet him forthwith! How often do you see a girl desert a clean man for a roué! How often do you see a woman, married to a so-called good man, opening the side door for the butterflies to come in! Watch any gathering of men and women, and you will



notice that the men who are holding the attention of the women are not the pillars of the church, or if they are, haven't been found out yet. Plenty of the more honest women, and good women, too, will tell you they do not want to marry a priest. Women are not better than we are; they are only finer rigged and finished. The vein of adventurous love, for example, runs in every one of them, and the man who wishes to please them must not play the rôle of respectful unworthy worshipper. You must give her adventure, variety, something forbidden; or at least the semblance of it, and above all, be the master. In one respect, women are like men. What comes sure and easy they do not prize and they would, in love matters, rather walk about in the shady mysterious wood, than follow a straight and monotonous road in the hot sun. How often do you hear a woman regret that she is not a man? Why? The answer is easy!"

I felt Harry pressing my foot with his. He said:

"We are having an unusual opportunity just now, Ed. Listen to what the Ober-Leutnant says and profit thereby."

"None of your sarcasm, Sir Violinist! You have not been waked up yet, but we will hear the same opinions from you one of these days!",

"I am not in a sarcastic mood. On the contrary I am quite interested in your views. My time has been spent in practising scales, so, as you say, I have not been waked up yet. Now let me understand you. Suppose you were to meet a woman, a good woman, whom you would decide to marry. How would you set about to win her? If I have understood you rightly, you would prefer and she would prefer, not straightforward honorable courtship in which a vital question would be asked and

answered, and then the parents consulted; but rather some oblique proceeding,—say an elopement; or a love adventure with complications?"

Harry put this question in the crisp and hard voice which one might have expected from a public prosecutor. I looked at him in astonishment.

"Well, royalty has even lately set us the example," declared the Ingenieur, laughing. "Well,—just so. Oh, of course, if she happened to be an exceptional creature and preferred the direct way, why, then, well and good. But ten to one, she wouldn't prefer it. And if I were after a woman who did not yet care for me I shouldn't proceed along the worshipping lines. I'd give her an adventure—and a walk in the woods!"

Harry looked down at his glass and nodded a time or two.

"I'll remember," he said.

"Well, gentlemen, this is enough for one lesson. Digest it well. I think we shall have a pleasant time Monday evening. Some pretty maids I know are coming down from Ragusa. Up there they have many luxuries we do not and they think they can show us things, but maybe we can open those girls' eyes a little. I for one am going to try. Be sure and stroll up when you see me talking to more than one of them in the ball-room, but keep your distance when I am with only one pretty floweret in the garden. I'll bear myself likewise. I must go. I came over horseback—don't bother to come with me. Don't get a headache or something Monday and fail to come, Doctor. Otherwise I won't have a hair left in my head that evening and that will hurt my chances. I have sworn to confess no longer after I am bald."



"*Oh—yes!* I see you going to confessional! The priest would have a stroke!"

"No he wouldn't! He'd make me swear to come only to his box, and no other—Auf Wiedersehen!"

His swaggering figure disapeared into the Marina. I half started to call the cash waiter and settle, but Harry tapped my arm.

"Wait a bit, Ed. Sit down again. I have an idea."

"Be careful with it—tell it slow."

"It will produce some fever, I think. Did nothing occur to you as he was discoursing about women?"

"Only that his screed was a most clever mixture of truth and lies. What occurred to you?"

"Nothing more nor less than a perfectly transparent explanation of your situation here."

"My situation seems good enough, Harry. They are all friendly and the Signorina is coming Monday night."

"I have been able to see better at last. I think you are living in a fool's paradise. I'll grant that it seemed all right to me, too, until the last half hour. I may be wrong, but—my idea clings with all the circumstances."

He mused a little.

"Well, devil take you, Harry—out with it! 'Parturient montes' "——

"Well, it is an ugly and poisonous mouse at least. Anyway, I wouldn't be a friend of yours if I didn't mention this thing—you can do as you please with it. We were both asses to imagine for a moment that old Tomanovich and his family mean to tamely let the Signorina marry and lose hold of her estate! I think I see the glimmerings of another plan. If they were not Italian"——

"Oh, curse your prejudices, Harry! I am in no mood to hear more of that nonsense!"

"All right, Ed," he said coolly. "Hoe your own row!—Pagare!"

The waiter came and we settled our accounts. Harry donned his hat. My temper had evaporated.

"Come, old man, sit down a moment. Put yourself in my place. Remember that the Signorina is pure Italian, or at any rate, very nearly so, and you will realize why it grinds me to hear about Italian falseness. The people you mean are more Servian than Italian. I don't know Servians—perhaps they are false. Call them so, if you like, but let Italians alone."

"I *beg pardon*, Ed! Of course I had no thought of the Signorina when I spoke. I honestly believe her to be a fine woman in every sense of the word—have never yet thought more highly of a stranger than I do of her. She is always excepted, remember, if I happen to forget your prohibition again. But I must tell you this thing in my own way, Ed."

We grasped hands and he re-seated himself.

"Ed, I admit I may be wrong, but I at least see another plan than their giving up the Signorina's estate."

"Harry, if anything, they are throwing me in the way of the Signorina. And they are not blind!"

"'Deed they are not blind! None see better! And you are right—they are throwing you in her way!"

"Well?"

"Well! And meanwhile his nibs the Ingenieur comes here and covertly preaches dishonorable methods with women! Do you begin to see? Or are your eyes like an alligator's, with a succession of lids to be opened?"

"No, I don't see."

"Your brain is not cerebrating then, for it is clear enough. Now—*see!* They do not know that you know anything about the estate or the will, nor the conditions under which the Signorina will inherit. They see, in you, just an inexperienced young man gone mad over a pretty girl. Now if she marry, they lose the estate—ergo, they do not want her to marry. If she safely become of age, they lose—ergo, they want something to happen before that day. What can happen? The will states it: If the Signorina break a rule of the church, they win; ergo—they want her to break a rule. Now the most natural rule to break is the rule against unchastity. Conclusion: they see you are mad about her, and that she, at last, is interested in a man—you. They throw you judiciously together, and the Ingenieur is delegated to put the meanness into your head. Their next step will be to keep you apart again, under the pretence of having discovered your attempt to win her, thus giving the next roll to the ball."

It certainly was an ugly and poisonous mouse of which Harry had delivered himself. It worked into my very vitals and gnawed there. But after a minute or two I felt relieved.

"Ah, Harry, it is ingenious as far as it goes, but you forget that the will also says if she marry before her majority she is to inherit. What, then, can they gain if I should ruin her?"

"The moment she is compromised, refuse consent to a marriage and clap her into a convent! How would you marry, then? You are still dull, my son. They'll never let you marry. Besides, Ed, it is probably not necessary to their plans that the overt act be actually committed. If they can surprise you and her under any compromising circum-

stances or obtain the seeming of it, as for instance an interrupted elopement, it will probably be enough for their plans. So far as shutting her up is concerned it will be enough if they can show that there was seeming danger of her being led off. The Signor can urge his duties as a guardian in defence. But it is their plan to have her ruined or the seeming of it and then shut her up, and supposing the ruining to occur, the rest is perfectly feasible—even easy. Once their object is gained they will throw *you* away like a worn out glove."

The argument was clinched. Harry had discoursed better than he knew, especially when he spoke of the convent, for I had not repeated to him any of the conversation which had taken place between Gisela and myself.

"How do you explain Lubitza's seeming wish to flirt with me and the Ingenieur's acquiescence?" I asked in a low tone.

"No doubt that is all done to egg the Signorina on. You saw that the girls are jealous of and hate one another."

"Can they shut a girl in a convent without a legal proceeding?"

"It takes a very small excuse anywhere where any Church has a large influence. A girl under age can be placed in a convent by her parents or guardians, be quietly kept there until her majority, and by proper management longer, especially if it be to the interest of the Church to do so. It is only necessary to have ready an excuse which can be quoted in case of inquiry."

I remembered one instance of which I had had personal knowledge in which a young woman under age, heiress to an estate, had been so immured because of a more than usual love for canine pets.

There had been no legal proceeding. It had been very quietly and expeditiously accomplished and few knew what had become of her. She would be inquired for and produced again at her majority; but in such a case as Harry made, the release at her coming age would not help Gisela, as far as her estate was concerned.

Harry's words had reached their mark. Every word and every circumstance of the whole affair supported his idea. That I was buried in the very depths of uncertainty and misery goes without saying. I could see no way out.

"What shall I do, Harry?"

"Ah! Now we come to a very crucial point and I wonder if you will make good. Your first duty is to think of her welfare, isn't it?"

"Certainly, Harry—at any rational sacrifice at all!—Well?—And?"

"It is simple enough. With or without the Signorina's permisson, go to the Signor at your very earliest opportunity, and ask for her. It is the custom, and he can think nothing strange of it. His answer will be affirmative if he has meant well by allowing you to be twice together alone, as it will be, the night of the ball. If he refuse or hesitate then our suspicions are justified. In the last case, tell him openly and flatly that he need never expect you to do anything wrong or dishonorable, but that you expect to have the privilege of seeing her at his house, and that you will exercise your right to win her in an honorable manner if you can. And say it so he will be convinced that you mean every word you say."

"Good, Harry. I'll do it just so!"

"Then," and he held up a warning finger, "carry out your words. Of course you are not going to

ruin her, nor try to, under any circumstances—that isn't the point at all. The danger is that if your seeing her be interfered with, you will see her at times and places which, however innocent, will furnish them a handle to use. Remember that is what they will be looking and planning for. As long as you see her at her own house,—or any other place with his or his wife's knowledge and permission, he cannot use it. But beware of seeing her outside of her house against his will. Remember! I know the Italian customs!"

"But in asking the Signor for her, may I not precipitate matters? I have gone far enough with her to broach that idea, and she was frightened out of her wits at the bare mention of it."

"Oh, I can't see that. Not even among Italians is a girl shut up because a proper man proposes honorable marriage for her."

"Well—thanks, old man! I'll talk with the Signorina about it as soon as I can. If I find it not best to go to the Signor, I can at least accept and use the second part of your advice."

And then we went to the hotel, I to dream of seeing her at church again next morning, which dream, as is often their way, played me false, for none of the family was there.

CHAPTER X

On Monday evening we arrived at the military casino about half past nine. Harry looked splendid in evening clothes. He had the advantage of height (being about six feet) which always helps out greatly that style of dress. He would be under no disadvantages in appearance at his debut, I was thinking. Harry had red hair, but it was the beautiful shade of iron-rust, very full and wavy, kept long enough but not too long, and his skin was unfreckled and particularly clear and fine when not peeling from sun-burn, as it was apt to do. It was evident at once that he would be a success tonight. He was observed from all sides as we entered and crossed the little dancing-hall, and I could hear the flutter in each group as we passed. That Harry himself was utterly unconscious of this, I was certain. Vanity was never one of his failings. The thought struck me, this evening, that it would have been more fitting if the Fates had reversed our positions. Gisela's great-grandmother had loved a violinist; why had Gisela not loved this violinist at first sight? I hoped Lubitza would find him so handsome that she would forget the family schemes as regarded me, for this evening, at least.

Paulo was the first of the party we saw and as he came up with outstretched hands I thought him a good harness-mate for Harry. In his way he was even handsomer, with his black hair, dark skin and big gray eyes with their long, thick lashes. He was quite as big a man as Harry. He greeted us as old friends. I was to learn that there would be no want

of cordiality from any quarter, for this night, at least.

"You are two good big fellows," I remarked. "I feel like a pumpkin between two stakes."

Paulo felt my arm.

"Oh, don't worry," he answered laughing. "You are not needing support as you grow!"

"He never did!" said Harry, and he proceeded to relate to Paulo some of our boyish conflicts.

The place was beginning to fill up, especially as quite a body of finely uniformed Austrian officers filed in together. Among them Paulo pointed out the Commandant of the garrison, resplendent with medals and orders. I began to be uneasy at the sight of them.

"Gentlemen, let us find our ladies and get them on our programs before that bunch gets a chance!"

"Yes, it is just as well," said Harry.

Paulo led us into a sort of drawing-room where, among others, were our ladies, already besieged.

"We seem to be none too soon!" remarked Harry.

"Don't worry," answered Paulo. "The girls will take care of that. Excuse me, gentlemen. I have like cares with less protection." And Paulo gayly made off.

Lubitza hailed us.

"Come, come, you lazy loiterers, if you want any dances!"

She gave us each a hand. I saluted the Signora and she informed me that the Signor would arrive later. Then I pressed through a little side group where I saw Gisela. She turned to me with a gracious smile. She was gay, her color heightened, and was a beautiful picture in a dress of light yellow silk with a short train, the bodice generously



trimmed with rose embroidery but all, otherwise, simply made. She seemed never to vary her style of hair-dressing—that was the same tonight as I had ever seen it. It seemed to me to be a sensible idea for a girl to select a coiffure which became her, and stick to it.

"How many may I have, Signorina?"

"Not too many," she murmured. "We must be careful."

I scratched my initials in several free places.

"I have taken the dance before the intermission and the two after it, so we can have a visit. Do you mind?"

"All right, Doctor!"

"We can go to supper promptly and then have a little time together. The dance after the intermission is a quadrille and the next one a polka. Do you care to dance them?"

'No, we can visit, as you say."

Lubitza looked at me reproachfully as I came up.

"I am nearly full, Doctor! Why were you so long? I have saved this waltz for you. Perhaps we can find one or two more."

The Ingenieur joined us and completed his program which was already nearly full. He took our programs and inspected them.

"Come, you are both too slow. There are lots of girls here that want to meet you, but there are more men than women tonight, confound it! The Ragusa lot hasn't come. The boat is late."

But they came, and there were plenty to go around. The girls were not all pretty, but all knew how to dress, sometimes daringly as to colors, but always becomingly. In some cases the company, both as to men and women, was brightened by a number of local peasant holiday costumes worn as



fancy dress, assisted by a number of military dress uniforms and a fez here and there. The men in evening clothes displayed the same fault which is universal in Austria and seems to be growing elsewhere; namely, they wore those ready-made ties which make a man in evening clothes look like a wax figure straight out of Madame Tussaud's establishment, and electrified for the occasion.

The excellent orchestra was from the barracks. The ball opened with some fancy national dances in costume. There were a tarantella, a czardas, a fascinating reel-like Montenegrin fling, a Roumanian fancy dance that made me think of our old boyish game of "crack-the-whip" (for many nationalities were represented at the ball), and a well-performed minuet, in which I recognized, for one, the banker's daughter, whom I had met this evening; a little dark, bright-witted girl, almost as pretty as Gisela.

I did not have the first regular dance with Gisela, and had inserted a fictitious initial in that number of my program so I should be free to watch her. It was a waltz and Harry was her partner. I saw at once that she did not dance well, probably through want of practice, but she would in time. Not so Lubitza, who was a sylph on the floor—a veritable feminine Mercury in her lightness and speed; for the tempo was swift and all danced with verve and enthusiasm, indifferent to the warm night and to wilting collars. They danced the waltz ever in the same direction—no reversing—and it made me giddy to watch them.

But after several dances my turn with Gisela came at last. I sought her out as care-free and happy as I had ever been, for all seemed rosy. Every one, including the late coming Signor him-



self, was so cordial and gracious that I forgot all croakings and the way seemed a level road paved with gold. I shall never forget the sweetness of that first moment when she placed her pretty hand on my arm and we began to waltz. She danced rather far from me, but it was the nearest she had ever been, and it was enough for now. But the pace was high and I was unused to the absence of reversing, and was soon giddy. She was likewise not in practice and soon both had enough. We gave it up with a laugh and wandered to a corner where we saw Harry and Lubitza with the Ingenieur and the banker's daughter sitting out the waltz. They hailed us.

"Ha! Drunk?" laughed Harry.

"Yes, and yet thirsty."

Harry gave his chair to Gisela. He whispered in my ear:

"Say, Ed, how many collars did you bring? I did not foresee this pace and have only two more extra ones—confound it!"

"Oh, I've got a box full. I can lend you some."

"Oh, yes! Now do you think a collar, right for your bull neck, would fit me?"

I swung my foot and down he came. I had not intended it, but the floor was like a surface of plate glass, and it was easier than I expected.

All burst into a laugh. A gay crowd gathered around us, clapped their hands and begged me to do it again. Harry got up, laughing, and started for me, but the Ingenieur seized him and whispered in his ear. Harry took my arm and marched me a little way off.

"See here, Ed, go and take the next dance with Signorina Atenasio—the Ragusa girl—or get her a partner; and if I am not back yet, look to Fräu-

lein Mauer. I've got to make a quick sprint to the hotel and change my trousers. They're split; you *jackass!*"

I managed it with the help of the Ingenieur and Paulo. In about twenty minutes I saw him rapidly making his way back through the dancers in my direction. I was dancing with Lubitza. He was pale and earnest. As he caught us he said hurriedly:

"Ed, want to see you soon as possible. Will wait in drawing-room!"

"Is your friend really angry with you?" Lubitza asked.

"Seems so. But it will be all right."

I hoped it was not true and meaning to make amends, I did not keep Harry waiting longer than I had to. When I entered the room he was nervously pacing the floor. He came to me at once.

"Ed, our rooms at the hotel have been ransacked —every drawer and every trunk is in disorder."

"Harry!'

"And I don't like the look of it! I had forgotten my watch, but it is still in the washstand drawer where I put it, although the drawer is standing open and has been gone through. It wasn't robbery! What do you make of it?"

The banker's packet came into my mind at once, and I grew cold. I had not yet told Harry about it. I grabbed his arm.

"Harry! Think! Was my grip disturbed?"

"It was standing open. Did you have your cash in that?"

But I had left him and was speeding bare-headed to the hotel. The grip had a false bottom which had been arranged for carrying an emergency shirt. I had placed the two envelopes in there and

locked the valise. This false bottom did not take up much room and opened from the inside. I hoped—I believed they had not found it, but I could not wait to be sure.

When I arrived at the door I was gasping and gulping for breath. Finally I managed to undo the door, turn on the light and look about. There came an immediate rap. Harry had followed me. I let him in, locked the door and ran to the open valise, dumped out the disturbed contents and pulled up the false bottom. The envelopes lay there, undisturbed. I sat down on the floor and mopped my face and neck. Harry was watching me.

"Do you keep your letter of credit there?"

"No. The place was only made for an extra shirt. It wasn't there originally. I had it fitted in."

He examined it attentively.

"It is well done," he remarked. "The workman evidently thought it was intended for smuggling." And he closed it again.

"I'll tell you about those papers later. I meant to do so before. I am to take them to Cettinje."

He frowned.

"You'll get enough of this thing before much longer, I'll bet! Leave them where they are. It is not likely they'll come again. Change your linen and let us get back."

"Do you believe this visit we have received has any connection with our friends here?"

"Can't make a guess. But it won't do any harm for you to see the Signorina's uncle as soon as you can, and carry out the plan."

"I'll try to do so tonight, yet!"

"The sooner the better!"

I had several apologies to neglected partners to

make when I got back to the ballroom, and by the time I had smoothed these pretty ruffled feathers as much as possible the last dance before the intermission was due. I found Gisela waiting for me in the drawing-room. The fine underlip was pouting a little.

"You have been gone a long time, Doctor Ransome."

"Have we missed a dance?" and I scanned the program.

"Oh, no. But the last I saw of you you were dancing with Lubitza and I haven't seen either of you since!"

I smiled happily. What luck that the rooms had been ransacked!

"I haven't seen her since our dance, either, Signorina. I'll tell you about what kept me—I have much to say to you, and it is serious. Let us go and have supper now so we can have as long a time together as possible."

Arrived in the supper room, we found we were none too soon, for other couples of the same mind were already there, and more coming. Lubitza was at the table with an army officer. She caught sight of us.

"I wish it were as cool here as in the park," and she winked with both eyes and laughed.

"You *were* with her, Doctor!"

"No, Signorina, upon my word of honor, I was not, not since the conclusion of our last dance."

"Let me see your program."

"I handed it to her. I was full of inward merriment. Her face cleared.

"I wasn't with any of these others, either, dear. I will tell you where I was later. I haven't seen Lubitza for more than a half hour."

"She is smitten with you!"

"Nonsense. She is only trying to tease—me."

"Me. But I don't believe that is her only reason. I tell you again, Doctor—flirt with anybody else you please, but not with her! I warn you I won't bear even the beginning of it! I *hate* her!"

"Don't worry, little sweetheart. I want you so badly that I wouldn't risk any flirtation even if I cared to take one on. And Lubitza does not attract me—not in any way whatever."

The clouds were all gone now and the fine little face was itself once more,—and the ices were good.

"Do you love me, dear?"

"I—I don't know—but—*something* is the matter with me!"

I couldn't have helped the laugh if somebody had been choking me. She grew rosy and joined in it.

"What's that about love?" asked the Ragusa girl who was sitting opposite us.

"Oh, the Doctor says it is an illness and can be cured with salts and senna."

"Bah! Wretch! Why do you sit with him?" and she disgustedly turned to her partner again.

Gisela liked salami sandwiches with caviare.

"Why were you gone so long?"

"Harry had to go to the hotel to make a change, and when he got there he found that both of our rooms had been ransacked. He came back and called me.'

She dropped her fork in surprise.

"Have you lost much?"

"Nothing at all. It was not for common robbery, Signorina, for Harry's watch was in plain sight and was not taken."

She rose out of her chair.

"Let us go and tell uncle at once. Perhaps he can"——

"No, no—above all, not that! Let me have my talk with you first. Let us finish supper and go out into the park. Others of the company have gone there."

Neither of us wanted more. We went to the Signora and obtained permission with the injunction not to stay too long. We rapidly reached the Marine Gate and walked up the Marina. Having gained the park, we sought a secluded bench by the water side. Other couples were wandering about but none came near us.

"Signorina, there are reasons why I felt I ought to declare myself to your uncle as soon as possible —I know, dear,—he will not give his consent now. But I want your permission to go to him. He need not know that I have asked you first."

"Alas, Doctor, that will end our very acquaintanceship. You will see!"

"Listen, Gisela. I love you better than my life! If I do not marry you, I will never wed another! Do you believe me?"

"I—yes, Edu— Doctor. If I did not believe you were true, I would not listen to you."

"Well, Gisela, if your uncle will not consent, I will always wait for you. I'll wait—I'll wait, Gisela, until I know that you have married somebody else—and then I'll wait—until I can forget you. Do you understand, sweetheart?"

"Yes, Edu— D— E—du—ard."

"Never forget what I have said, sweetheart. Now listen! I would mourn indeed if our acquaintance had to be interrupted; but—Gisela—better that than something else! Unless"——

"What do you mean, E-du-ard?"

I explained Harry's suspicions at length, and all the grounds which made for them. As I proceeded she sat up straight and looked me directly in the face. By the moonlight I could see that the firm little mouth was compressed into a line. After I had finished she continued to gaze at me some moments, then she drew a long breath and looked away over the gulf.

"So, sweetheart, you see, for your own protection—in order to avoid anything that would serve them as an excuse—in order to make them understand at once that I cannot be used as a tool against you—I must see your uncle and declare myself. True, in that way, we may be kept more or less apart thereafter. But after you have reached your majority they can separate us no longer,—they will also no longer have any interest in doing so. I love you, sweetheart—better than my life. If necessary I can wait for you. If you love me, you can wait for me. So in three years we can marry. Unless"——

"Unless what, Eduard?"

I studied her a moment. She put her hand on my arm.

"Unless what?"

"Gisela dear, you are to inherit a large estate. I am nothing like as well off as you will be, but I have enough for us both if we be satisfied to live modestly. We can be happy and comfortable on what I have. Do you think you could let the estates go, or run the risk of it, and marry me in defiance of your people? Probably you could still fight for your estate in court."

She caught her breath and her eyes blazed. In defiance of time and place she screamed—

"What! Give up all to that abominable selfish vixen Lu——"

I clapped my hand on her mouth.

'Signorina! Are you mad? Remember where we are!"

She pulled my hand away from her face but held it tightly in her own.

After a little her breast ceased its heaving and the eyes became soft again. She released my hand and began nervously fanning herself. Then she snapped the fan to, and spoke kindly but firmly:

"Signor, if you were a Croesus, there would not be enough for me without my patrimony. Even if that were no more than a thousand crowns, I would never give it to my cousin and that foul-minded Austrian. If it were uncle, I would not mind—but not to them, not as long as I am in my right mind, Signor; not as long as I have breath left in my body, and can fight them. No Eduard, that would not do at all—you have not at all understood my feelings in this matter. Your words have their sweetness. They show that you love me for myself and not for what you might get through me." (She took both of my hands in hers.) "Believe me, the meaning of your words has not been lost on me—I have understood." (She released my hands and sat further away.) "But, Signor Eduard, I will be honest with you. I cannot truthfully say I love you yet, but I believe I soon shall—no, no, wait!—but Eduard, if I loved you as much already as any woman can a man, I still could not do this. Give all to Lubitza! That vixen! No, Eduard, my hate for her is older than my fondness or love for you, and will not down so easily!"

I had expected it would be so. I had had little hope of any other decision from that clean-cut firm

little mouth. And who could blame her? I had little doubt that she had reason enough to hate her cousin. All that was new in her speech was the glimpse which it afforded of the strain of iron which stiffened that fine little nature and made it something else than dough.

"Do you hate Paulo, too, Gisela?"

"Paulo is a sneak, Eduard! Look out for him. He is a keyhole adept. No, I don't hate him—he is not worth hating."

"Then, Gisela, we must try if your uncle will give you to me"——

"That is idle."

"And if he will not, we will wait. I will make him understand, once and for all, that if they have any such plot in their heads, I am not to be used, and that will clear our path."

"Such a plot would not help them, anyhow, as far as taking my heritage goes. If they succeed in depriving me of it, I give you my word that Lubitza shall never enjoy it."

"How will you prevent it?"

"I have my plan."

But I couldn't remain so serious. Besides, I did not know when I would again have her thus all to myself.

"Gisela, give me my heritage!"

"And pray what is that?"

"A kiss!"

She promptly moved to the other end of the seat, and I could see the saucy twinkle in her eyes.

"Take it!—if you can."

I sprung at her, but she was strong. In the course of the scuffle something fell from the bosom of her dress onto the ground. I found that if I

succeeded it would be at the cost of wrecking her ball costume, so I gave it up for now.

"Aha, Signor! Not so easy, *is* it?"

"I see, Gisela, that you are obstinately opposed to giving up a heritage."

She laughed and bent down to pick up the thing that had fallen. It was a small stiletto with a richly jeweled handle, in a jeweled sheath. She drew it from the sheath and the style glittered in the moonlight. She passed it to me. It was a beautiful old piece of work.

"Do you always carry this?"

"Oh, dear, *no*, Eduard! I brought it tonight because I meant to give it to you. You remember uncle told me to when we were looking at the old violin."

"Well, give it to me now."

"No, I have changed my mind."

She was very beautiful in her present high color which not even the moonlight could pale. Natures that can hate well, can also love well. Let her once love me as well as she hated her cousin—let that love for me become a little older and a more constant and dominant thought, and I felt sure that Lubitzas, estates and all else would fall readily into the background. Time was flying. The intermission was long over, I was sure.

"Signorina, have I your permission to ask your uncle for you?"

"I do not know if I love you, Signor!"

"Ah, then, Signorina,—under the circumstances —I have nothing more to do in Cattaro. Harry has been waiting to go north for several days. We shall pack up tomorrow and leave on the noon steamer. I have only to say good-bye, then, Signorina."



Her eyes shone with mirth.

"Why wait until noon, Doctor? You can still pack tonight—right away. I'll see that your ball partners are cared for. You can leave in the morning at eight by the local gulf-boat and go to Castel Nuovo. From there you can go to Ragusa horseback. In that way you can be in Ragusa before the Ragusa girls get back, and give them a delightful surprise by meeting them on the pier at Gravosa. Your trunks can go later by the noon boat. They say the ride from Castel Nuovo to Ragusa is very wild. That will just suit your present mood."

"Farewell, Signorina!"

I was in high dudgeon and my bow was as sweeping as that of an olden time knight in his saddle. I left her sitting there and strode rapidly back to the ball-room. I was just in time to settle the disquiet of the banker's daughter, for our dance had begun.

"I was not sure you would come—it is a pleasant surprise, Signor. I fear that in only one ball you and your friend have acquired a bad name for keeping engagements."

But she was all right in a moment. She was a bright, gay little girl and loved dancing. In spite of myself I caught her mood for the moment, and enjoyed myself. As I took her to her seat she presented her mother who had not been with her when I obtained the dance. As I left, I whispered in the daughter's ear:

"Tell your father that my friend's and my rooms were plundered tonight, but please do not mention it to anyone else. We lost nothing of any consequence."

I nodded good-bye in the midst of her surprise. Then came two dances, I do not remember with



whom. I was keen to get Harry's ear a moment. Finally I succeeded.

"All is off with the Signorina. We can go north in a couple of days."

"What's up? Have you scrapped?"

"Yes."

"Ah! So much the better!"

But in a moment he smiled.

"When it is on again, let me know. I won't pack up yet."

"She doesn't care a rap for me, and I am not going to burn my fingers any more. I'll go to Cettinje tomorrow and we can go north Thursday."

"You won't talk with her uncle then?"

"What for? The thing is off."

He thought a moment.

"Do it anyway—tonight. You may make it up, and then this urgent thing will be done. In any case, it won't do any harm, and we can form an idea if we have been right. Tell the uncle you want her, and tell him also that we go this week. That will show him what your intentions are. I must be off."

No, it could not do any harm and I was as curious as Harry to know if we had been right. After spending a half hour cornering Harry, the Ingenieur and Paulo, I succeeded in clearing a full hour for Signor Tomanovich. I knew he was, or had been, playing taroque in a room upstairs with some other old fellows. I made my way there.

The several elderly men present had grown tired of cards and were talking politics. As I entered the Signor courteously rose and came to meet me.

"Are the ladies ready to go home?" he asked.

"Oh, dear, no! No sign of that, that I know of. Signor, can you give me a little time?"



"Why, certainly, my boy! We can step out onto the balcony. Come this way."

"After you, Signor!"

He passed out and I followed. It was already just daybreak, and the air was delicious. We found chairs.

"Signor, when I was on my way to Cattaro with your prospective son-in-law, it did not occur to me that I was to meet my own fate here, but that has happened. I love your niece. May I marry her if I can win her?"

He did not seem exactly consumed by surprise. He looked at me kindly and quizzically—then more seriously. Then, still smiling slightly, his gaze sought the open square which lay in front of the Casino. "What a thing it is to be young!" he remarked to himself. A rag-a-muffin below was begging. He threw him a kreutzer. Then he smiled musingly again.

"Doctor Eduard, I fancy I am the only man living in Austria today who ever received a marriage proposal for his ward at four o'clock in the morning. Well, good work can be done early in the morning." Then he turned to me.

"Of course we have noticed that you were interested in Gisela, but I did not expect a visit quite so soon. No matter. Does my niece second your wishes?"

"I think not, Signor. That must come later," I looked down.

"Ah! First catch your hare"—— Well, Doctor Eduard, you have gone about the matter in the honorable old-fashioned way."

"You may always depend upon it, Signor, that I shall never seek her in any other than the honorable way!"

He looked up at me keenly and I met him eye to eye. His face softened a little.

"No, I don't believe you would. We have several people in these parts who have been in your country and learned your language. They have brought back two idioms of yours which are now understood almost everywhere. They are 'square' and 'all right.' I believe that both of these expressions will apply to you, Herr Doktor."

"Thank you. I will say nothing as to their general application, but they will answer correctly in this matter."

"Schön! Have you spoken to my niece at all?"

"We had a conversation tonight."

"And you say you do not know if she love you?"

"I am certain she does not—yet," I answered very bitterly.

"Ah! Then not much can be done, Herr Doktor. If she does not love you, of what use to give my permission? I could never think of coercing her."

It required all my strength to repress the smile. Of course he would not coerce her!

"I have asked permission to win and to wed her —not merely to wed."

"To win her, if you can, in the honorable way, is your right by the laws of Nature. To wed her is another matter, my boy. It is not so simple. Do you know anything of her situation?"

"Every one here seems to know something of the Signorina's status in life, Signor, but I knew nothing of that when I first saw and loved her. I am not a penniless adventurer, Signor. I am not rich like the Signorina will be, but I have a competence —enough to keep up a modest house, and so far as I am concerned there is no question of a mar-

riage dot. I would be only too happy to take her without a kreutzer, sir."

There seemed to be plenty of sympathy and interest in his face. He seemed to be revolving many things in his mind as he watched me. "I wish things were reversed," he murmured, half to himself.

"Reversed? How?"

"I was thinking of my own daughter, Herr Doktor. I love both the girls, but of course"——

"Your daughter is already engaged, is she not?"

"Oh, I doubt very much if that marriage ever take place, Herr Doktor! Besides, she is not formally betrothed."

"If you allowed your own daughter to be engaged why not allow your niece? Your daughter is two years younger, is she not?"

"Oh, that is a different matter—and you are speaking of their years only. As a matter of fact, my niece is much the younger."

He had me there, for it was true enough.

"Is it not your duty to allow your niece to marry when she can marry happily—and fairly well? Is it not safest and best for her?"

The question was a pretty daring one and I would never have risked it if I had felt that I had much to lose. But I had no more real hope and did not care very much what happened.

"I am quite sure that my duty to my niece is best understood by myself," he responded very stiffly.

"Pardon me, Signor, if I have seemed offensive. I did not mean to be. I'll grant that you are in a better position than I, to know what is best for her. Well, in fine, Signor, if I have understood you rightly, you do not object to my trying to win the

Signorina, but you will not agree that I may have her, if I win her."

"Not until she be of legal age, Herr Doktor. I can say nothing else, and I beg of you, boy, do not take the refusal as personal in any sense. I would make the same answer to any other person whatever. Indeed, as far as that is concerned, I hope you *will* marry her at the proper time. According to my best judgment, I could wish her nothing better. I have taken a great fancy to you, boy, and I like you none the less for your open and plain speaking. Well, it is growing light and I see the fish boats are setting out to sea. I think the ladies will have had enough by now."

I found the ball room nearly empty when I returned. Our friends were not there. I arrived in time for the very last dance and had it with the Ragusa girl. After this, on searching for them, I found that the Tomanovich family had departed. As I was leaving the Casino Harry joined me.

"Well, I danced your dance with the Signorina and put a hint in her ear why you were not there. Did you have it out with him?"

I repeated the conversation.

"Aha! Utterly non-commital! We were right! Now you will find the gates barred!"

"It does not matter," I answered.

CHAPTER XI

It was late in the afternoon when Harry and I got about again. By the time we had had coffee and were out of doors the usual gay evening crowd had gathered on the Riva. Very few of our acquaintances were there, but the bankers' daughter was one of the exceptions. She was there with some friends who had not stayed so late, and was as fresh as any of them. She hailed me and presented me to her companions. She apologized for her fault-finding speech of the previous evening and managed to whisper in my ear:

"Father wants to see you before you go to Ragusa. He told me to tell you quietly."

"Thank you, Signorina. I'll call and see him tomorrow morning."

So I could not go to Cettinje tomorrow. Perhaps it would not be necessary to go at all.

For the rest, our evening was a lonesome one. Finally Harry and I seated ourselves upon a timber at the edge of the pier.

"You have not yet told me about the papers in your valise. Just as you please, you know."

Harry changed his seat so he would face landward, and I murmured a recount of my interview with the banker and added that I was to call and see him the next morning. He said:

"This is connected with some political crookedness as sure as you are a foot high. Wash your hands of it, Ed! You can do so tomorrow morning."

"I will see what the banker has to say. Perhaps he has changed his mind and does not wish the message to go."

"I sincerely hope so! If not, refuse to take it. You are justified after what happened last night. At least demand some knowledge of what you are doing. Is it too delicate a question if I ask you why you quarreled with the Signorina? She did not seem very happy the rest of the evening, Ed."

"Oh, not at all," and I related this, also.

"Oh, you *chump!* And you took good care to make it a final quarrel, too!—and you deserted your dance with her without getting her a partner—for it was only by chance that I saw her sitting it out!"

"Yes, I did not seek her afterward."

"Oh well, your later confab with her uncle may make her feel like excusing you. Besides, I am not up in women, but I dare say the Ingenieur is not wrong in some of his views—I dare say it does no harm for a woman to find that we have an edge. Still, she has a good deal to forgive. You left her, it seems, away out in the park. She had to return alone through the park, the Riva and the Marine gate. Ed, if she forgives that very soon, you can conclude that she thinks a lot of you! It was an insult! And about nothing!"

This view of the matter was new, and shamed me. Harry was right! What a pitiable bad-tempered out-and-out fool I had been. Poor, dear girl—she should have my best apology as soon as I could get it to her. And, too, she must be reasonable enough to accept it, at least after a day or two, for I had a little on my side. Our conversation had not been one to be treated flippantly, and she knew that my time in Cattaro, at best, could not be much prolonged.



"Harry, do you suppose our rooms were visited last night on account of"——

Harry gripped my arm until I almost sung out. He had been facing inward, I outward, as we sat. The moon had not yet risen and the light was small and fitful.

"Ed, unless I am very much mistaken, there go Paulo and that Greek priest! Yes, it is they. They are walking toward the end of the pier. I'd give something to hear what they are saying."

"Probably they are speaking in Servian."

We watched them. They were conversing very earnestly with their heads close together. They sat down upon a block of stone at the very edge of the pier at the northerly corner. We waited in silence for a couple of minutes. Harry looked about him a little.

"Ed, I am going to have a try at it. They may be talking Italian. I believe there is mischief in that big curly headed pater, and I don't trust Paulo or his friendship any thousand miles!"

The Signorina had said he was a sneak and called him a "keyhole adept." It wouldn't be bad to give him a dose of his own medicine. But I had not happened to repeat this to Harry. Paulo's behavior to us had been more than above reproach, but on the subject of these people Harry was incorrigible.

"Well, don't get caught, Harry. When we eavesdrop we put ourselves in the wrong."

"Oh, don't worry! Eavesdropping is no sin in Europe, for man or woman. It is quite according to the Code."

"But you can't get near enough. There is no cover near enough."

But Harry was not to be turned from his purpose

"That is a precious pair, Ed, and I am going to hear what they are saying!"

A dory belonging to a neighboring wine boat was riding alongside of the pier, barely visible in the shadow of its parent. Harry's eye fell upon that. He sighted along the pier and leaned over and looked at its face.

"There is room between the bang-rail of the pier and the timber next below to lie and hear what they say. I'll leave my clothes with you and swim down, and climb under the bang-rail a little before I get there. If they hear me, I'll simply dive off and swim to the corner of the park where the light is. Then you can take the dory and my clothes and come for me. But in the meantime you can go a little nearer, there at the end of that pile of timbers, so you can see if you need to come out for me —but be careful they don't see or hear you."

He climbed down into the boat and disrobed, neatly packing his clothes into a pile. After handing them to me he let himself softly into the water and swam up the pier.

I had little faith that Harry would profit by this, but I took the light bundle of clothing and moved up the pier. I could find cover no nearer than forty feet or so. Here I deposited the bundle in the end of the pile of timbers, and waited.

The pair conversed a long time. Of course I did not learn the tenor of their conversation until later, but for the reader's convenience I shall reconstruct it here, as Harry afterwards detailed it. After he had got settled and begun to listen, the first speaker he heard was the priest, who was speaking Italian:

—"and I have always thought he ought to be watched. I have never quite known, before, that

he was Pan-Servian in his leanings. We hate the Catholics, of course; but better them and the Austrians than that successor of Alexander who is neither Roman nor Orthodox but merely the money loving tool of a party of scheming assassins. Nor do I believe that Sbutega really smypathizes with the Court at Belgrade. I simply believe that he or some correspondents of his have speculated in Servian rentes and their policy is to protect them; otherwise it is incomprehensible how Sbutega, an Italian, can be interested in any Servian union or extension of Servian influence in the Balkans. Certain it is, that he is not laboring for the Orthodox Church! When did this American bring the envelope?"

"I am not quite certain. Last week when he and his friend returned from Montenegro. I can find out."

"Don't trouble. Is this Montenegrin to be trusted?"

"He has always been reliable as yet."

"When is the American going back with the answer?"

"He is to go when he pleases."

"Ah! That may be tomorrow morning."

"No,—no carriage has been ordered, and I know anyhow that he is not going tomorrow."

"Paulino, it would be better, a great deal better, if you could manage to get rid of this fellow in some other way. If he be stopped and searched at the frontier it will make an ugly mess, I am afraid. He will be sure to invoke the help of his Embassy at Vienna. That is never a joke, and in the course of the matter I am afraid our private plans will leak out. They are both sharp looking lads and I am afraid they guess too much already. Once we

start such a thing as this we can't stop it when we please, Paulino. Can't you manage some other way? Can't you—say—provoke him—and run him off?"

"Father won't have that and it would be difficult to invent an excuse to quarrel with them, anyhow. He is after my cousin, but"——

"You cannot quarrel with him for wishing to marry her, of course; but wait a little. When he finds he cannot marry her he may give you your excuse, and we will have the whole affair disposed of together."

"I have told you what he said to father last night. He spoke so pointedly that there is no doubt he realized what he was saying. He will want the estate with her, and he will do nothing to endanger it. That is why we do not care to risk him any further,—the more so as he has some influential friends in Vienna. Count Weyer-Reinbach is one. We found that out through Advocate Michaelovitch. Weyer-Reinbach is Catholic, of course. So getting these fellows into a common quarrel would probably expose us surely enough, and in the worst quarter. No, he can only be disposed of by getting him into something that will compel him to leave Austria for good and all."

"Is he really dangerous?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean is he likely to acquire an influence over your cousin?"

"Not a doubt of it!"

"Has he money?"

"Enough to make us trouble, I fancy, if they figure out the right way."

"They will imprison him if he be denounced."

"We do not believe they will convict him. They



will confine him for some months and finally try him. It has always been so. Then they will believe his story that he, an American, did not know what he was carrying and let him go; but they will probably order him to leave the country, and by that time he'll be glad enough to go. It is a pity those fellows did not find the paper! That would have made it sure."

"Who is this private secretary of Sbutega?"

"Simitch. He is a relative of ours, but Sbutega doesn't know that."

"He will be useful to us in another way later on."

Then they were silent for awhile. The priest resumed.

"After all, I see no objection to your idea. If you play your parts well, the American will not connect his arrest and detention with his love affair or with us, so there is no reason why he should use it in his defence and put them on our track. And the plan will effectively dispose of him. You are certain he is not going tomorrow?"

"Absolutely."

"Very well. I'll send the letter to the Commandant first thing in the morning."

"Make it sure that I am to be only a witness as to his identity and must be taken there absolutely against my will."

"Basta! Am I a *young* fox, then?"

During this conversation, I was standing in the shelter of the pile of timbers sincerely hoping that a rat would not bother Harry and he would not catch pneumonia. Finally the priest and Paulo rose and sauntered down the pier. After they were out of sight I gathered up Harry's clothes, went to the

dory and waited for him. In a few moments he appeared, passing himself along the timbers. He climbed into the dory, mopped himself off with a handkerchief as well as he could and silently dressed.

"Are you chilled?"

"Chilled! With my color of hair? You are joking, Ed. Go to the café and wait for me. I'll go to the hotel, wash up, and be with you as soon as I can."

In due time he appeared at my table and seated himself opposite me. We bent forward over the table.

"Well, did you hear and understand?"

"Every word—after I got there."

He detailed the above conversation. I said:

"Well, Harry, you had figured it out exactly right!"

"Yes, including the banker. Now you must get rid of those papers and see to it that you are not roped in for any more nonsense of the sort."

"I'll tell the banker the whole thing tomorrow morning. He has been friendly and I think it is due him to tell him that his private secretary is a traitor."

"That will not be good for the private secretary but as you think best. I feel no sense of duty with regard to protecting him. Only, *get rid of the papers!* If you choose to run yourself into trouble after all this warning it is at least due me as your friend to give me time to get out of the way. If you have time for bars, I have not, I assure you."

CHAPTER XII

In thinking the matter over I decided to go to the banker's residence early enough to catch him before he started for his counting-house; for I had been unable to figure out how his private secretary had obtained his information and did not care to risk again his ingenuity in overhearing us.

"Signor Sbutega, I sincerely regret having disturbed you so early, but there is a reason why I must see you here rather than in your private office."

"Oh, be seated, Doctor Ransome. No apology is necessary, my dear Sir. I was already up."

"Signor, your private secretary is a traitor to you."

His face remained impassive, except to look at me inquiringly.

I detailed the ransacking of our rooms, and then the conversation which Harry had overheard. During this latter recital his heavy white brows drew together. For some minutes he made no comment.

"Have you a little time, Doctor?"

"Plenty, Signor."

"You may return me the large envelope. The small one you must keep and use should you ever need it."

"Thank you, Signor." I returned the large envelope with alacrity enough.

"Signor, I still wish you to go to Cettinje, but this time not in my interest. I wish you to go carrying a false packet."

"They may arrest me at the boundary."

"They doubtless will—and search you. But when they find this false packet they will let you pass with apologies. This arrangement is in your interest. It is better, now, that you go, and carrying a packet, and that they find it. They will thus find themselves on a false scent. In that way they will not annoy you in the future—perhaps after you get to Vienna. When one has been denounced for conspiracy in Austria, the agents of the government will keep after him until they find *something*. It is better to let them find something right now, and be done with it."

"Quite right, Signor." I can see reason in *that*."

"Further, my dear Signor, my apologies and my sense of obligation to you will now never see their end. All would have been simple if I had reckoned with the possibility of my clerk overhearing us. As it is, I do not understand how he managed it, but I shall devote myself to solving that little riddle in the course of the next day or two. But for the present you may arrange to go with the false packet. I will send the real one by another hand. It will not be so safe and certain, but of course I shall not risk your welfare, in the matter, now."

"Very well, Signor. Only you need not carry any eternal sense of obligation with you. We must all run a chance risk in life, now and then. Pray do not feel so about it."

"Your kind words only make the matter worse—but we need not waste time over that now. I have stolen enough of your time and good-nature, Herr Doktor."

I liked the banker, and I wanted to oblige him. Also he might be a powerful friend some time or other in the future, when such a friend might come

handy. We never know in advance how that may be. Also, I hate to be thwarted.

"If there were any way to do so safely I would be perfectly willing to deliver the real message, Signor."

"I don't feel like troubling you further with it, Doctor. Of course it would be a great relief to me, but"——

"The trouble is nothing, Signor. I only ask to be surely safe this time."

"That can be arranged with certainty; but"——

"Very well, Signor."

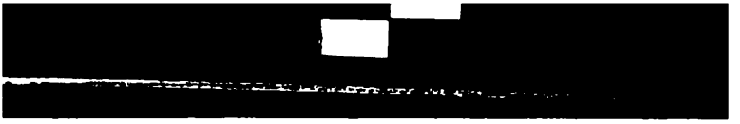
"So be it, then. And remember you can call upon me in the future whenever you need me. I will arrange in this way. You will go with the false packet only. After they find that, they will let you pass. You shall know in advance what it contains. After you are once in Montenegro, you run no farther risk for yourself—the remaining risk is mine alone. The Austrian arm does not reach over the Montenegrin frontier. From that point on it is necessary only to keep the matter out of the knowledge of persons who have no business with it."

"I have understood, so far."

"Very well. Now you will remember that after leaving Njegusi, another heavy serpentine starts up from that valley, taking its start just after rounding a small farm deep below the road."

"I remember the place. There is a round stone threshing-floor just at the turn of the road before starting upward."

"Exactly. As you pass this farm, a laborer there will hail you. Halt your carriage and let him come up. Buy a package of tobacco from him, and in the course of the barter hand him the false envelope when your driver is not looking. When you get to



your hotel in Cettinje open the package of tobacco and under the contents you will find the real packet. You know the rest."

"Agreed, Signor."

"The laborer will be a Montenegrin whom you may have seen in Cattaro. He is faithful to me, but the persons at the other end will not accept him as a go-between because years ago he served the Austrian government in a minor capacity and in consequence is not a member of their organization. He will, however, not dare to play me false, as I have a peculiar hold upon him. Now, Doctor, here is the morning paper, and some magazines. I am going to the bank and shall return inside of a half hour."

He was back in less than the time he had set. The Signor was an active man for his years.

"Ah, yes, Doctor, I am still a good insurance risk. Now here is the false envelope. It is just like the first in appearance. Since they talked of Servian rentes, I have placed Servian rentes in the packet." (He pulled the papers out of the envelope and showed them to me.) "There are one hundred thousand crowns in these bonds. It is necessary that the amount be fairly large in order to lend truth to the false message."

"I hope you will receive them back safely."

"That is my risk, Signor. If anything happens to them, you are absolved."

"And if they ask to whom I am taking the false packet?"

"Answer that you are delivering the bonds to a purchaser, but refuse to say to whom. They have no authority to insist upon the name of the purchaser."

"Good."



"The day before you start, call in person at the bank and ask me to remit to Ragusa. I'll understand."

"And your private secretary, Signor?"

His brows met again.

"For the present he will remain—my private secretary."

I spent the remainder of the morning on the water-front in the hope that Teresa might come, but she did not appear. My next move was to call at the house that afternoon. I threw pride to the winds and wrote a very penitent letter for Gisela, taking care to tell her that I had formally asked her uncle for her the night of the ball. I begged her to try and see me in some way, and to let me know through Teresa where it would be, but cautioned her to select a time and place which would give nobody a chance to make her trouble.

As far as I was supposed to know, there was no reason why I should not go to the house, so about four o'clock I took a barque for Stolivo.

When I entered the gateway I saw on the veranda a little party in which I soon recognized the Signor, Lubitza and Paulo. As soon as they saw me the two men rose and courteously greeted me.

"Welcome, my boy! We have been thinking you might come today. But where is Signor Harry?"

"Harry is answering some delayed letters. He sent his greetings and the word that he will call before we leave."

Paulo shook hands cordially. I wanted to throw him over the railing of the veranda.

"And are you determined to go so soon, then?" asked Lubitza.

"Well, Signorina, we cannot take up our resi-

dence here, pleasant as it would be, and Harry is urging me to go every day."

"Your friend is an icicle! I like you better. You have warm blood in your veins."

"So has Harry—but he has a thick shell. Have you quite recovered from the ball?"

After we had been seated a few moments I asked for the Signorina.

"Oh, she is sulking in her room. I'll send word to her that you are here."

She gave the message to a maid who was occupied in the room adjoining.

"What did you think of the Ragusa girls?" asked Paulo.

This started the ball topic once more and by the time that was well on, the maid returned with the message that Signorina Gisela had a violent headache and begged to be excused. She sent her greetings and hoped I would come again soon.

Our conversation continued, but I fear I made poor work of it. Gisela was surely very angry when she would not see me. I did not believe in the headache. My mind was largely occupied with the question of how I could get my letter into her hands. I did not dare to entrust it to any one but Teresa, and she was not visible. Of course it occurred to me to walk boldly down the veranda, knock on her door and give it to her, but I was afraid her uncle would demand to see it after I left.

All of them seemed determined to talk to me at once and my head swam. Try as I would, I could not keep my eyes and thoughts off of Paulo's handsome smiling face. If I had not learned of his and the priest's interview from Harry's own lips I would have doubted its occurrence. He had laid a plan to have me incarcerated for months, as he

himself believed, and he was now begging me to remain the summer with them, planning deep sea fishing, excursions into Turkey and the Hercegovina, and even a trip into Greece—together. I made up my mind that if the opportunity should ever come, there would be a reckoning with Paulo.

I remained as long as I decently could, but no chance offered for delivering my letter, so I finally left messages for the mother, Gisela and the Ingenieur, and took leave of them.

Lubitza walked with me as far as the gateway, taking my arm down the path. I could not refuse my arm, but sincerely hoped my sweetheart, for once, did really have a headache and was not looking on through her window-blind. Moreover, Lubitza was confidential and leaned upon me almost affectionately.

"Doctor, *must* you really go so soon?"

"I really must, Signorina.'

"I wish you could stay longer!" and she pressed my arm. "We could have a good time together."

"And have the Ingenieur call me out! Thank you for nothing, Signorina!"

"Pshaw! We are neither of us in love. He would never trouble you."

"Why are you going to marry him, then?"

"Oh, my dear Doctor! Girls in Austria do not marry for love! They marry for *liberty*! I am going to try my voice in Vienna and if I can be an artist I'll have my liberty without having to marry. An artist lives a free and natural life in this country. And Austrian men marry for the dot—never for love."

We had reached the gate. I passed out, turned and gave her my hand. She held it and looked me in the eyes with her brows raised inquiringly. I

returned the look and after a moment slowly shook my head. She dropped my hand and reddened, still looking me in the face. Then she half-turned to start back, still keeping upon me that half-wondering, half-embarrassed look.

"Ah, Doctor, Doctor, you are one of those men who do not see when Luck hovers over your head!"

"We often walk by our luck, Signorina, and only see later on when our minds are less preoccupied."

She laughed.

'Ah! Later on, then! In Vienna! Will you see better then?"

"Let us hope that I shall see, at least, well, then."

"Good! It is an arrangement. A riverderci, Doctor!"

I raised my hat and she started back to the house.

I did not leave for Cattaro at once but walked in the direction of Perzagno, still revolving in my head all sorts of impossible plans to get my letter into Gisela's hand. It would not have been very difficult to go back after dark, climb the end of the veranda and thrust the letter under her door, but fortunately I was sane enough to see the folly of that or any similar move. If I sent a bouquet or a basket of fruit they would be sure to look over it well before giving it to her, if, indeed, they gave it to her at all.

The hope that Teresa might appear caused me to turn back and hang about the neighborhood awhile; but no one appeared, so I finally stepped into my barque and started for Cattaro. Perhaps Harry could suggest a way.

That evening we talked the matter over, but, alas, for once, I found him as jejune as I was.

"I have allowed my bad temper to cut me entirely off from her. I doubt if I see her again."

He blew a vast puff of smoke.

"Keep cool and play close to your belt. You may draw a royal flush yet, Eddie."

CHAPTER XIII

THERE seemed nothing left but to keep watch at the water side in the hope of a chance meeting with Teresa, and I spent, on Thursday, the longest, dreariest day of my life in this thankless occupation. No one from there appeared—not even the Ingenieur.

About half past five I gave it up and going to the hotel to freshen up, found that my letters from Vienna had arrived at last. One of these, from Major Scarlatti, was directed to no less a person than the Commandant of the garrison, himself. This letter would have been all I could have asked, but it came, of course, too late, as I already knew all the people I cared to and more. The one from Count Weyer-Reinbach was to a local dignitary in the Roman Catholic diocese of Cattaro. Of course the letter to the Commandant might be useful in case I got into trouble in the Montenegro enterprise. I now felt entirely safe on that score, but decided not to take the letter to him just yet. The letter to the Churchman engaged my thought for a time as I was dressing. Of course I understood, now, that the Greek Church priest was assisting the Tomanovich family in their schemes, and that he or his church would probably share the proceeds in case of success. I even knew from the interview which Harry had overheard that they feared exposure in Roman Catholic quarters. But it was a delicate consideration to think of setting the Catholic party also into the hunt. It might be a case of from the frying-pan into the fire. In any

case, such a move must have Gisela's acquiescence, and moreover be well-considered. I could not guess how far Count Weyer's help or even his sympathy (or rather his wife's, for she was the Catholic—the Count himself had about as much religion as a Viennese cab-driver) would go in such a case or just what direction it might take. In fact, I could see no especial use for his letter. I would present it, of course; courtesy to the Count demanded that. Well, the delay in the coming of the letters had made no difference, at least.

That evening Harry said:

"Ed, better give it up and clear out of here. It is better so."

"Not while I have a taw left to play with, Harry!"

"Very well. Then let me suggest at least this. I think they intend to give us a wide berth from now on. As long as you stay here you will not get to see the Signorina unless it be in some way that will play into their hands. You see, you have made it easy to keep you apart by your quarrel with her. If they know about it, they will not let that fact lose anything—you can bet on that. Now, I suggest this. Make your trip to Montenegro, and then let us formally depart, bag and baggage. We will stop off at Ragusa, and you can quietly return and probably be able to see her long enough to set yourself right with her. After she believes you have left she will probably be in a more forgiving mood, and they on their side will probably have ceased egging the quarrel on."

"The minute I return here everybody in this little town will know it."

"All in good time. The family may not happen to hear of it until you have had an interview. Any-

way, I see no other course. Give your signal to the banker tomorrow morning. Go Saturday, return Sunday, and we will leave Monday noon. That will give enough time, besides, to catch any real chance of delivering your letter. You can leave it with me and if I see Teresa while you are gone I'll see that she gets it."

"Thanks, old man!" And I gave him a hand grip. Then I told him of my letters.

"Present them both later—after your return. You can explain that they came the evening before you went away. Presenting them now might interfere with the banker's plans. We don't know what his strings are."

Which was a very real truth, as I was to find.

Early the following morning I ordered a carriage for the next day with a change of horses at Njegusi and then visited the bank and carried out Signor Sbutega's instruction.

"I will remit," he said, and graciously bowed me out.

It was about five o'clock that afternoon that my good fortune returned to me. I was in my room packing a portmanteau when there was a knock on my door.

"Herein!"

The door opened and my heart leaped for joy, for it was Teresa. She came in cautiously and closed the door.

"I have been trying for over an hour to slip up here without being seen. I hoped to find you outside somewhere. I did not know you were here and meant to wait until you came."

I think my reception of the old woman was all she could have wished—perhaps more, for I was

so glad to see her that she got an embrace. She laughed.

"Signor, you must save those for"—— but her laugh died out. "Signor, I have only a moment—I must not be caught here. I bring you a warning from the Signorina. You must not go to Montenegro again!"

A warning! My soul became warm with the sweetness of it, and life was good,—aye, very good, once more. Teresa hurriedly continued.

"You are to be arrested at the frontier and searched, Signor!"

I scarcely heard her. Of course Gisela might still be angry with me—probably was, but she had taken the risk of a vast and long-continued unpleasantness with the family if this warning should come to their ears.

"Signor! Have you understood me? You are to be arrested and searched at the frontier. I have no time to stop and *drill* it into your head!"

I put my arm around her shoulders.

"I know it already, Teresa. Nothing serious will happen to me. I have nothing that could interest them. I have a letter for you to take back to your mistress."

The amazed and discomfitted woman waited silently while I got the letter.

"Teresa, be sure that none of the family find out that I have had the warning"——

"Hum. I am old in their service, Signor. I love my mistress. I have no wish to be set out of the house," she answered grimly.

"Very well. Now, Teresa, take this letter to your mistress. I wrote it days ago and hoped to deliver it the day I called, and have been watching faithfully for a chance ever since. Take your mis-

tress my thanks for her warning. Tell her I love her—better than my life. Tell her I regret more than I can tell, my sorry behavior Monday night. Tell her I want to see her. I'll be back from Montenegro Sunday evening. I'll be in Cattaro Monday."

"Oh, are you still going?"

"Oh, yes. I am in no danger. Assure the Signorina of that. Try and get her to see me Monday. My friend and I will go north Tuesday or Wednesday. I want to apologize in person for my behavior the night of the ball."

"Signor, you have more to settle with my mistress than that!"

I was certainly surprised.

"What do you mean, Teresa?"

She observed me narrowly—and grimly.

"I must leave the telling to her—if she will come. I must hurry, Signor."

"Thank you for coming, Teresa. Try to get your mistress to see me."

"I'll try, Signor."

She slipped out of the door and cautiously passed down the hallway. I went to a window and saw her go safely out and fly down the street. I wished I did not have to go to Cettinje but still it was that fact I had to thank for the reuniting of the broken thread, so I did not curse the journey.

I set out Wednesday morning at an early hour, ready for the necessary occurrence at the little custom-house far up on the serpentine road.

My driver informed me that a couple of carriage loads had preceded us, having started at daybreak. Of course this information was no surprise, and, besides, as we passed Fort Trinità I could see



them slowly creeping up the serpentine road high above us. It was past ten when we ourselves arrived there. As we rounded a corner to ascend the last stretch which led up to the custom-house, we saw there a considerable party of men, strung about the road between the douaine and the primitive mountain-inn which stood opposite. As we drove up we saw that a file of infantrymen blocked the way.

"Wonder what is the matter!" said my driver.

We drove up and my driver turned his horses before the inn and stepped down from his seat. A halt for rest and refreshment is nearly always made here, in any case.

We were received in silence. I got out and began to stretch myself a bit. An officer came up to me, and I recognized him as the Commandant himself, he having been pointed out to me at the ball.

He saluted. I raised my hat.

"Herr Doktor Ransome, I believe?"

"Yes, General Richter. I saw you at the ball, but was not fortunate enough to meet you personally. I received a letter of introduction to you from Vienna yesterday."

"Yes, I know. Major Scarlatti wrote me beforehand about it. I shall hope, in the next few days to be the means of your meeting any people here you care to know—if any remain. You and your friend seem to have managed very well without letters if I may be allowed to judge by what I saw Monday evening." He smiled, but grew grave again.

"But just for the present, I am sorry to have to inconvenience you a little, Herr Doktor. Having the Major's letter, I have come in person to manage this affair, in order to see that you suffer no un-

necessary discourtesy. I shall not detain you a moment longer than is necessary, and later, if you will give me a chance to do so, I shall do my best to erase the necessary discourtesy which you will suffer today. I regret the matter, Herr Doktor, believe me, but duty leaves me no choice. Will you kindly come into the house with me?"

I followed him into the custom-house, and the file of soldiers closed up behind. After traversing a small hallway we entered a medium sized room where I saw a desk and chairs and little else except a stranger in plain clothes. The Commandant and a leutnant entered with me and the door was closed. The Commandant seated himself at the desk.

"Bring in the identifying witness," he ordered. The leutnant opened another door.

"This way, Signor," he said.

In came Paulo. He looked at me sadly and raised his hands in despair. He did it well! I even thought I saw tears in his eyes. It was the first time I had ever seen anything resembling emotion on his face.

"Be seated, Herr Tomanovich—is this Herr Doktor Ransome?"

"Yes," said Paulo, in a broken voice. I gazed at him with a wrought-up interest. He was superb!

"Thank you, Signor." Then the Commandant turned to me.

"Herr Doktor Ransome, are you willing to give up quietly the papers you are carrying with you?"

I tried to look surprised, but I fear Paulo left me on the back-stretch so far as acting was concerned.

"Papers? Certainly, General! I have only an envelope which I am to deliver in Cettinje. I do

not understand that the matter is specially confidential, beyond the fact that I was requested not to mention the name of the person to whom I am to give it." And I handed him the envelope.

Once more I saw Paulo's expression change. He actually looked a little surprised.

"Please do me the honor of examining them at the same time I do, Herr Oberst."

These words were addressed to the stranger. He arose and seated himself at the desk with the Commandant. They broke the seal, spread the bonds out upon the table, and looked them over. They did not seem surprised—or if they were they kept their faces well.

"Are these all the papers you have?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, Herr Oberst."

"Do you object to a search?"

"Not in the least."

"Kindly lay off your clothes as far as your underwear, and please remove your shoes."

I disrobed as directed. He gave the clothes a careful going over, including the shoes. Then he examined me. In this matter I appreciated the great personal consideration extended to me by the Commandant, in having this personal search conducted by a Colonel of the army instead of by a common soldier. The whole was an example of the princely courtesy which is usual with the Austrian military officer. Of course, since I had to be searched it did not really matter much to me who did it; but I understood the courteous intention. And the Colonel himself had doubtless donned civilian clothes that morning because he felt that such a proceeding ill became his uniform. I could little complain of the mode in which they performed their

duty. During the whole proceeding Paulo was the picture of commiseration. Having finished, the Colonel courteously gave me permission to dress again, and went to the door whence he brought in my portmanteau. At his request I unlocked it, and continued dressing while he turned out and carefully examined its contents. He asked me if the grip had any secret compartment and I answered in the negative for this was not the one in which I had hidden the original packet.

"Shall I repack your portmanteau, Herr Doktor? I suppose you know better where everything goes."

I gravely repacked it.

There was a knock at the door. One officer and two soldiers entered. The officer reported that nothing had been found in the carriage.

"Very well—lock the door."

There was a moment of silence. The Commandant looked at the Colonel and raised his eyebrows. The latter nodded his head.

"Obey your orders!"

The two soldiers instantly sprang upon Paulo and pinioned him. For the third and last time I saw his face wear an expression. Paying no attention to his astonishment, they deftly removed his coat. Having done so, they handed the coat to their officer, and forced Paulo back into his chair and held him there.

The officer examined the pockets of the coat, and then the lining. From a place in the back which had been ripped and re-sewed, he drew an envelope very like mine but of very thin light paper. Amazement held me spellbound.

The Commandant ripped open this one also. This time there seemed to be no lack of interest in their work. He and the Colonel seemed to point



out various passages significantly to each other. Finally the Commandant said:

"It is enough—quite more than enough!"

Amazement had never left Paulo's face. If his astonishment were of the same genuine stamp as his commiseration of me had been, I could still farther compliment him. Still, there seemed a difference—his amazement seemed a little more real—but only a little more. He baffled me completely.

A sergeant was called in and produced hand-cuffs which he placed upon Paulo's wrists. Then without once having found his voice, he was led out. The Commandant again turned to me:

"Herr Doktor, in this entire affair we have acted in accordance with previous information. Of course we knew we would find nothing compromising on you, but it was necessary that we have proof of the fact. Our search of you was much more for your own sake than for any other reason. Now you will be disturbed no more. Later you may be called as a witness in regard to what you have seen here today, but I do not believe so. In any case, that will be the extent of any future inconvenience so far as you are concerned. Here are your papers. Although duty left the Herr Oberst and myself no choice, still we offer you our fullest apologies, Herr Doktor."

I acknowledged his *amende honorable* with the best grace which my amazement would permit.

"Will Pa—, Herr Tomanovich, have serious trouble, General?"

"I have little doubt of it. We have found a paper of grave significance, and artfully concealed, the nature of which I may not explain to you. Yes, he will find himself in a net. His being still young may help him—I cannot say for certain."

"I am sorry."

"Don't waste sympathy on him, Herr Doktor," he answered significantly. "Besides, our young men must learn to do their patriotic duty to their government and let political intriguing alone!"

He accompanied me to my carriage which had already been put in readiness.

"When did Herr Paulo come up?"

"We brought him with us. He supposed he was to identify you."

We were soon ascending the rest of the serpentine which lay between the douaine and the pass. I was trying to think the matter out. Paulo had shown himself an actor of the first order, but the more I thought of it the more was I convinced that his bewilderment was real. Had the banker managed this? It would have been easy enough for some agent of his to have done it, say some time when Paulo had been bathing in the gulf. Notwithstanding the Commandant's words, which of course I had perfectly understood, I could not help but feel for Paulo a little, though not without the further feeling that simple justice had come to him. He had received exactly what he had planned for me.

Truly the banker's arm was long, and he had known how to strike back soundly upon the meddler in his affairs.

And how would this affect my affair? I could depend upon it that the young man's father would hold me, however innocent, responsible with the rest, and would not see me again, even if he rested with that. And how would Gisela feel about it? I would not be troubled by Lubitza again, I fancied!

I received the package of tobacco as previously arranged and finished my journey in time to walk



by the Prince's palace between four and five o'clock. That night I placed the envelope in the fence post, and returned to Cattaro the following day without incident, arriving at the hotel in time for dinner. In the meantime, I had decided to see the banker and intercede for Paulo. I believed he could undo what he had done, if he would.

CHAPTER XIV

"WELL, we shall soon know which way the cat will jump. You may expect *something!* They will not let this pass without a return, Ed. You may depend upon that."

"But I had nothing to do with it!"

"They will not believe that. What I look for is that the Ingenieur will call you out.

This conversation occurred Sunday evening after I had related the previous events to Harry.

"What will you do if it happen?"

"If the Ingenieur call me out?"

"Yes."

"I hardly know, Harry."

"Better be thinking it over! Are you in practice with any arm?"

"Only the two fast to me."

"Yes, I know your practice with those, but they won't serve you in *this* instance."

We finished dinner and left the hotel to take a turn on the Marina. He took up the subject again.

"You won't go north?"

"Not yet," I answered doggedly. "Besides, they would be sure to think I were running away—if you be right. The Ingenieur could find me in Vienna as easily as here."

"Very well, we'll stay it out. But take a stitch in time. Present your letter to the Commandant and mention the fact that you may need a friend. He will probably take the hint and take care of the matter. Of course you are not a coward, Ed, but

a duelling scrape would exactly play into their hands."

For once, however, Harry's cleverness proved to be at fault. I received no visit nor communication from either the Signor or his future son-in-law. On Monday I called to see the banker, but they informed me he had gone north and would return Saturday. That afternoon I asked Harry to watch the Marina for Teresa and called upon the Commandant with my letter and gave him the hint Harry had suggested.

"They will not dare!" he assured me. "They will have enough to do the next few months or a year without looking for more trouble!"

He furthermore answered that he saw nothing he could do for Paulo—the matter was out of his hands now, he said.

Later in the afternoon I called at the house of the Bishop and was informed that he was at his summer residence. I left Count Weyer's letter and departed.

That day and the next passed without news from any quarter. I urged Harry to make his trip into the Krivocije, and after another day of waiting, he consented, leaving Wednesday morning. He would be back Friday or Saturday.

And so the long weary week rolled by. I had left only the hope that Gisela might come to church Sunday. I almost prayed that it would not rain.

And it did not. The day broke fine and I began to watch the Stolivo locality as early as eight o'clock. After two hours of waiting and many disappointments I spied a barque upon which I rivetted my glasses. After a time I made out two women sitting in the after part, and later to my joy and relief recognized the Signorina and Teresa. I went

to the Marine gate, passed under the arch, and awaited them there.

The women were conversing gravely as they came through the arch. Teresa saw me first and dropped behind. Gisela gave me a little smile and walked on. As Teresa passed she said:

"In the Cathedral at two o'clock, Signor."

* * * * * *

I entered the church a little before two. A little past the hour they came in.

"I'll watch at the entrance, Gisa mia." And Teresa took her stand there.

I took Gisela's hands in mine, but she would not look at me.

"Have you read my letter?"

"Yes, Herr Doktor."

"Do you forgive me, dear?"

She stood first on one little foot and then upon the other. She drew her right hand away and swung it like a child would do. Her eyes took a flying glimpse at mine, the little mouth half smiled. She stood a little nearer me, then farther away—then a little nearer. She half turned away, but she made a mistake and turned in the *wrong* direction, for she turned her right shoulder toward me, and as I was still holding her left hand, that—why—of course—it made my left arm go around her shoulder, and—well, there is no need to worry the reader with these details. Besides, such a moment can only be understood by people who do not need an explanation. Again, I do not remember all that happened the next two or three minutes.

"So then, you love me, after all, Gisela?"

"I think so, Eduard—it must be that I love you—as nearly as I understand it, I do."

"Will you marry me?"

"If—when I can, Eduard."

Then she broke away and looked at me severely.

"But, Signor, I do have a quarrel with you! No—go away. It is not to be settled with a kiss! Did I not tell you I would stand no coquetting with my cousin? You have had to wait a whole week on account of that!"

"Why!—*you little savage!* When have I coquetted, pray tell me!"

"When you called! And before—the night of the ball! As you very well know!"

The underlip was once more out. She seemed to mean it.

"Dear heart, I have not coquetted with anybody. Why do you accuse me of such things?"

"You flirted with Lubitza the night of the ball! She has boasted of it. She says you *were* in the garden with her—and that you made love to her—and tried to kiss her!"

"That is utterly false! Every word of it! I did not even *see* her outside of the ball-room!"

"And when you—came—over to call—and went away—you and she—walked arm in arm—to the gate—and talked there—and you—and you held—her hand at the gate!—just like a pair—of lovers! You thought I was—sick and wouldn't see—you."

"Oh, Gisela!"

"And she—says you are going—to be friends—in Vienna when—she goes there. You—planned it—at the gate. Oh, Eduard!"

Her handkerchief went to her eyes and she sobbed heart-breakingly. I put my arm around her shoulder, pulled the handkerchief away and turned her chin upward. She was shaking with—laughter. The silver peal itself now rang out again and again.

Then she ceased to laugh, pulled away from me and put on a serious expression.

"But, Eduard, she did say these things—really! I believed them at first. I thought you might have done it after you left me sitting in the park. (*Aren't* you ashamed of yourself? Good! That is *something* at least!) But when she said you tried—to kiss—her, I no longer believed her."

"Of *course* not, dear!"

"Because—she—would have let you do it, if you had tried—I know my cousin!"

Again she laughed at my discomfiture. Then she ceased her raillery altogether, and took my hands in hers.

"No, dear Eduard, it is all nonsense! I did not come this week because it was not possible. The family has neither gone out nor received anyone, and I had to stay in with the rest. *Of course* your letter made everything right, dear Eduard. Quite everything."

Here came another moment that will not interest the reader.

"Let us not risk this any more, Eduard."

"Teresa is watching, dear."

"Yes, I know, but still it is better not—here—Eduard."

"Do you love me?"

"I think so, Eduard."

"You are going to marry me?"

"Yes, when I can, Eduard—if you will still have me then."

"You remind me that we shall have to wait. I shall wait, dearest. Never doubt that! If one of us fail to wait for the other, it will not be I, dearest."

"I shall wait for you, Eduard."

"Dearest, I have been worried to death for fear that this thing which has happened to Paulo would forever keep us apart. What does your uncle say about it?"

"Oh, Eduard, that is a *dreadful* thing! My aunt has not left her room since we heard of it, and my uncle just walks the floor. They say he will be shut up for months and months, and that he may never be free again. Today my uncle, aunt and Lubitza have not come from their rooms. That is why I could come over. There was no one about to refuse permission to come to church."

"Where is the Ingenieur?"

"Eduard, I do really believe he is a coward, after all. Uncle says he has gone to Trebinje. I think he has run away."

"Afraid he'll get mixed up with Paulo?"

"I suppose so. Eduard, do you know how it happened?"

"I saw the arrest, of course, and saw them find the paper. I know nothing more—only that he had denounced me, and thought he was being taken up there to be a witness against me."

She closed her little jaw tight.

"I hope they will shut him up for a long time! But we are all puzzled. Uncle says he knows nothing of political plotting, and that the family has always been for the Austrians. Have you really no idea how he came by the papers?"

"No more than you have, Gisela. My word of honor!"

"Uncle swears that you put them in his coat."

"I! Gisela, as soon as your uncle can think a little better, he will realize that I have never had an opportunity to do such a thing. Besides, I, too,

know nothing of your politics here, and have no interest in them."

"Well, Eduard, I must believe you, but I would not have blamed you if you had. I think it would have been splendid. It is *just right!* I am not a bit sorry for him. I could feel sorry for uncle if I were sure he had not been part of the plot against you, but I believe he was."

"I think so, too, dear."

"And yet I am sure uncle liked you," she half mused.

"Maybe. But he likes some other things and people better."

"Oh, yes. He worships Lubitza and is under her thumb. Then comes Paulo—then my aunt. A long way afterward come I—and then other people."

"How did you know I was to be denounced?"

"Teresa heard Paulo and Lubitza talking of it. Teresa finds out most things for me. If it had not been for Teresa, I would have been dough in their hands."

I resolved I would never forget Teresa whatever should betide.

"When we go back we are going to say we took luncheon at Signor Sbutega's house. Signorina Sbutega and I are good friends."

"Idiot that I was! I might have got my letter to you sooner if I had known that!"

"No, Signor—it was best as it was. It is true Amalia and I are good friends, but never trust a letter to any other hand than Teresa's. Letters are always read, in Austria, Signor—when you would think they wouldn't be. You can trust your mail to the postman only, in this country, Eduard."

Time was flying and I saw Gisela was beginning to grow restive.

"I must soon go away. Where shall I send letters to you?"

"Only to Teresa and not to our address."

"I'll send them to her in care of the bank."

"That will do until uncle finds it out, at least. Give me your address."

I wrote it down and gave it to her. She thrust it into her reticule.

"And you will wait for me, Gisela?"

"I shall wait, Eduard—but remember, no more flirting with my cousin. You may flirt with anybody else under the sun, but not with her!"

I did my best to chide the notion out of her mind, striving to show her, in a way that every lover has, that there was room for only her in my mind and heart.

The time began to fly by again, unnoticed. We forgot the chances of interruption, as well as everything else in the world. There always comes a moment when lovers blunder—perhaps because they are true to their purpose and do not divide their minds between their love and side-issues. Teresa had already twice warned us that the interview was too long, but we did not know when we would see one another again and had begged for just a few minutes more.

We were, in fact, just about to part when we were startled by an amazed exclamation from Teresa. She was running toward us as we looked up. I had the presence of mind to pick up Gisela's reticule which she had droped in her fright and we ran to a corner at the side of the nave.

"The Signor!—and the Ingenieur! They are coming this way—up the street. We can't get out without being seen!" Teresa explained excitedly.

I knew already that there was no free exit except

the front portal. A side door there was, but I had tried it when I came and had found it locked. There was little time for debate. I thought hard and fast. The possibilities did not require much conning. I realized that we must not be caught here, for the sake of Teresa herself and her future usefulness to us, even if there had not been stronger reasons. Gisela had sunk down on the pavement in a ghastly fright.

"Speak quickly, Signor! What shall we do?" urged Teresa.

"Teresa, calm yourself, and leave the church. Meet them and stop them—detain them all you can. Your mistress dined at Sbutega's and has already gone home. You were in the church to find Gisela's reticule again. Here take it! Go!"

She collected her senses in a most creditable way and made a prompt exit. I seized Gisela by the waist and arm, and raised her up.

"There is not a moment to lose! Hurry!"

'Where are you going, Eduard?"

"Hurry, child! Hurry!"

We arrived at the right hand side door in the altar screen, to the rear apartment of the cathedral, and here she pulled back with all her strength.

"Come, Gisela! Do you want them to find us?"

I again took her about the waist. She fought with all her power.

"Eduard! What would you do! I cannot"——

"Come! We must hide here! Come! Come!!"

She tried to pull away fighting me almost madly. I was nonplussed at her behavior, but there was no time for questions and arguing. I stooped, picked her up in my arms and stumbled and ran into the inner apartment in the apse of the church, behind the altar and ikons.

She was now limp in my arms. I lowered her to her feet and supported her while I cast a hasty look about the place. A door to one side stood a little open, and a key stood in the lock. I hurried her there and pulled the door further open. It seemed to be a large closet for vestments. I pushed Gisela inside of this, reversed the key to the inside, and then stepped to the side door of the screen where I could look into the outer church and watch the front entrance.

We had barely been in time. Signor Tomanovich and the Ingenieur in violent altercation with Teresa came together into the church. The two former came walking up each side of the nave, systematically searching the church. I stole to the closet, went within and locked the door.

There was a considerable space between the bottom of the door and the sill, and I lay down on the floor and put my ear there. For some moments I heard nothing—then I saw their feet as they came toward and into the apse of the church.

"They won't be here," I heard the Signor say.

"It won't hurt to look," replied the Ingenieur.

I heard them move about. One of them tried the closet door.

'Folly! Of course they are not here!'

I heard them move about again not far off. Then they stopped between the closet door and the Holy Table and consulted. Their feet faced each other.

"They have been too sharp for us. Teresa!"

I heard her answer from without.

"Don't you dare leave the church!"

They conversed in low tones near the door, but I could only catch fragments.

"I don't think it would have done any good, anyhow— The American understands—in his own in-

terest will do nothing we can—. If they meet in the church—so better to let them alone until—take to meeting somewhere else."

"I have had my talk with ——, will be enough if we can show that they are meeting secretly. He is willing, on that much, to sanction ——. I did not have time to explain this to you before because I"—

"Well, we have failed this time, at any rate. I suppose— somewhere in the neighborhood and posted Teresa in — signal them. We have been too hasty, and have managed badly."

"Perhaps she has not been able to ——."

"Basta. The thing is off for this time. No use to try again very—more rope. We—better informed before——."

"Lubitza is ——."

They were moving away. I saw their feet pause a moment at the communicating door on our side. Then they went out and I could follow them a very little way into the congregation room. After a time all was silent. I noticed now for the first time that Gisela was sobbing. I whispered.

"Dearest, they have gone and all is well. In a few moments we can go."

I unlocked the door and cautiously looked into the outer church. The place was empty again. Finally I ran to the main entrance and saw all three going down the street. I watched them out of sight and returned to the closet.

"Come, dearest, the coast is clear."

She came out, hanging her head dejectedly. I closed the closet door. She raised her head, looked fearfully about, and then ran headlong out into the church, stumbling and falling against a column. In an instant I was by her side.

"Dearest, what is the matter? We have escaped them!"

I raised her up onto her feet.

"Do you not understand, Gisela? They are gone. You are safe! You have only left to be careful about going home."

She did not weep violently, but sobbingly and persistently. Nor did she seem hysterical. Puzzled to a stand-still I could only drop my hands and gaze at her in growing uneasiness. It was only after quite a few minutes that she became a little more composed, and seemed able to talk to me.

"What is the matter, dearest? We are safe."

"Oh, Signor—Signor! You don't know what we have done!"

"Done! Whatever do you mean, dear?"

"Oh, Eduard! Of course you didn't know, but I have broken one of the most sacred rules of the Church!"

I could only look my astonishment.

"You didn't know, Eduard, but that won't help me. That inner room is the Sanctuary. A woman is forbidden to enter there."

"What! A woman may not go in there?"

"It is so, Eduard."

I was speechless a moment and then I was torn between the desire to laugh and honest sympathy for her in her real distress. I called to mind the bare room with its dreary white unadorned walls, the room bare of everything, even of furniture save the Holy Table which stood behind the central door of the screen. Forsooth should she have endangered her inheritance because she had entered there? It was only by the greatest self-mastery that I restrained a shout.

But after a moment I recalled the wording of her



great-grandmother's will as transmitted to me by the banker; remembered that who had any interest in doing so would construe this as literally as necessary; called to mind that the present trustee of her estate was seeking an *excuse*—not a reason; recalled the fragmentary conversation which I had but now overheard, and the words of the Ingenieur that somebody "would sanction" something or another merely on the ground of our having "met secretly,"—and with these reminders all desire to laugh died out. I thought I could guess what this person would "sanction," and this excuse would surely have answered his purposes better than a mere secret meeting with the servant standing by, and in such a public and supposedly righteous place. For among Roman Catholics in Europe it would have been no offence to make pure love in a church. A priest of my acquaintance had once said to me "better there than somewhere else." I fancied it would be the same in a Greek church. But a profanation of the sanctuary—and hiding together in a closet therein—however unwittingly and innocently —*that* excuse, they could doubtless use.

"But, darling, no one has seen it. No one will ever know."

"Oh, Eduard, when such a thing has been done, the priest will always know!" and she began to quiver again.

Here was pure superstition, but here was neither time nor place to combat it.

"Gisela, neither the priest nor anybody else will ever find it out this time, and if they do they will know that I carried you in—bodily, and against your will, for I remember you fought against it all you could. I did not know why. Take courage, darling!"

"Oh, Eduard!" she moaned drearily, "the priest will know! The priest will know!" And she waved to and fro.

I could only look at her in despair. After a few moments a change came over her. Her face grew rosy, her lips redder, and her eyes hard and bright. She turned upon me in a fury, speaking partly amid clenched teeth, partly amid the forcible taking of breath.

"Wretch! Brute! Mule!—*Now* I am lost! Now that vixen—that witch—that *men's plaything* —will have my patrimony! And it is *your fault!* You—you—Oh! (and stamped her foot in a very paroxysm of rage). "Oh, I wish I had never seen your face! Why, oh, *why*—was I such a fool—fool —fool! Go! Go back where you came from, whatever nest it was! Go—and flirt and play with other women—make fools, dolts, idiots of more girls —and never forget that there is one down here in Cattaro who wishes you had never been born!"

She clutched her dress and started for the entrance. I couldn't have stopped a ewe lamb, not to mention a strong, healthy, enraged young woman. There were no words for my helpless astonishment. A little of rage there was, too, but I could not have given it voice if I had wished to. Out of sheer inability to move I would have allowed her to go, if she had not stopped and turned her eyes upon me one moment as she was about to reach the entrance. That gave just the necessary time to get my breath again. I made a half dozen bounds and reached her. She held out her arms as if to ward me off—in fright, I supposed. I siezed her arm.

"Gisela! Listen! I won't argue with you! I'll go away and never return. You shall have your wish—you shall never see me again. But listen!



Never speak of this afternoon and nothing will ever be known! The priest can't know about it! See that you yourself never let it be known, and all will be well."

I dropped her arm and retreated a step. She was still angry, and looked at me one moment, half opened her lips as if to speak and closed them again. Then she turned and flung over her shoulder:

"*Go* then! The farther the better!"—and flew out of the door and down the street, utterly oblivious of collisions with the people she passed.

I watched her out of sight and then strove to collect myself a bit. It was rough, but I could balance against it my treatment of her the night of the ball, for which I had had far less cause, and I was a man—grown; she, a young (and superstitious) woman. I was able to forgive the two last speeches, the more as I believed she would regret them keenly when she came to herself. I believed I had only to wait patiently a few hours in order to hear from her again.

Well, she was safe now, at all events. We had escaped for this time and I made an iron resolve not to see her again except in company. We could do our love-making by letter after this—if indeed, it was destined to be done at all.

What wolves a property dispute can make of a family! Here was a girl made, not for balls and flirting and to be a mere clothes-horse in life, but one endowed with all the sweetness Nature ever gives; one meant for a happy, quiet life with some man who understood her; one meant to be the boon of chubby-faced children, and later the goddess of her sons and daughters. Now this sweetness was

turned into gall and hatred—for I had at least been able, I thought, even now in her excited words, to read no especial love of money or avariciousness in general, but only that fixed hatred of her cousin which showed its ugly head whenever her name was mentioned. During our conversation the night of the ball she had said that her hatred of Lubitza was "*older*" than her love for me. Yes, her hate for her cousin was an old rooted tree with a long firm grip upon the soil, while her love for me was but a tender plant of yesterday. Any conflict between these was bound to end to my discomfiture, for a long time to come, of course.

I was leaning against a column near the cathedral entrance occupied with these thoughts when a deep taunting voice behind me broke the thread and made me fairly leap into the air in surprise and fright.

"Well! You seem to have played and lost, Doctor Ransome!"

I waited just five seconds, and when I turned I think I was fairly composed.

Confronting me, with a sneering, lowering face, was the massive, towering figure of Padre Petrus, the priest.

CHAPTER XV

THAT a battle was on, was evident at the first glance, and I braced myself for it. His words indicated that he had heard a part of our interview. I determined that what he might have overheard would be the extent of what he should learn.

He was an enormous man, not corpulent, but massive and powerful, and stood a good head and neck above me. This fact, together with his high cylindrical clerical hat with its overhang at the top, and his flowing hair, made him a truly impressive object. It was small wonder that he had much influence among the mostly simple and more or less wholly superstitious people of his flock. He had not, before, impressed me as having a bad face, but it seemed villainous now. I may have been prejudiced. Certain it was that if his face had any possibilities in the way of kindness, he was concealing the fact well, just now.

"However, Signor, as you had no stakes up, I suppose you will not find it hard to be a philosophical gambler."

I made no reply but merely waited for what further he had to say.

"I have always supposed that Americans were a clever people. I did not ever expect to meet with one of them who would prove otherwise. On thinking the matter over, and taking into account the circumstances under which you have been and are, do you yourself not wonder how you could have assumed that an Oriental-Orthodox church would

be left unattended so long as you have chosen to remain this afternoon?"

I did not answer. If he would tell me what he had seen and heard I would let him.

"Moreover, you are meddlesome. You are like an old gossiping woman who must stir with her finger a neighborhood trouble in which she has no interest. Otherwise you would not have been fetching and carrying like a trained dog for that old spider who sits yonder in a counting-house."

"And? Riverenci?"

"Do not use that form of address to me!" he said very sternly. "That is for Roman Catholic heretics."

"Very well—sir."

He eyed me a moment, then he said:

"Come with me, Signor. I wish to show you something."

I followed him, determined to let him do the talking until I had something to say. He led me through the church back into the apse again. He pointed to the door of the closet.

"You were there."

He then pointed to the door opposite.

"I was there." Then he folded his arms and looked sneeringly down at me from his towering height.

I suppose he would have succeeded in throwing me into a panic if I had not so felt the necessity of keeping my head. I wondered if he had actually seen us or only drawn an inference from the last part of the interview between Gisela and me, which I now understood he had overheard. However, his next words set all doubts at rest.

"You seem to have some personal strength for a



little man. Not everybody can pick up a full grown woman and carry her about against her will."

I am a man of quite average size or even a little more, but I was little alongside of *him*, so I had no inclination to resent the gibe.

He had seen the whole affair! Why, then, had he not come out and denounced us to the Signor and the Ingenieur? Surely, there was a reason for his not having done so. And why was he having speech with me now? That he had some ax to grind, was obvious. I determined to let him tell me what it was.

"Well, Doctor, do you understand that I was a witness to the whole affair?"

"Certainly." And I looked at him inquiringly.

"Doctor, I think you understand Signorina Gisela's situation. Your behavior here tells us that. Do you also realize what the events of this afternoon mean to her? Especially under the circumstances?"

"Not precisely. Of course, I can make various suppositions."

"And the first one you have in mind will be the correct one!"

I made no answer to this.

"Doctor, you seem disposed to let me do the talking—or is it merely that your guilty mind has nothing to answer?"

"I do not yet understand why we should have any conversation at all, sir. You have seen what occurred,—what more is there? I infer from what you hint that you mean to use this knowledge against the Signorina in her affairs. Well, a talk with me will not alter that intention, I fancy. Why waste time over me, then?"

His face abandoned the sneer and took on more of the habitual priestly air which it wore when

flocks of children on the street would kiss his hand, or when, in the service, his parishioners would do so, as he gave the Holy Bread.

"Because I have a proposition to make to you. I think you have guessed as much, have you not?"

"What? And I so unclever?"

"It did not require any cleverness."

"Well, I got far enough, at least, to wonder why you did not appear and tell them where we were."

"Just so. I did not interfere because I saw a way of using the occurrence to better advantage, and I think you will make no difficulty about it when you understand it. Now, Signor, you realize, do you not, that I can have Signorina Gisela deprived of her estate if I make this occurrence public?"

I did not quite believe it, for it had occurred to me that the Austrian courts might not be willing to construe the will so literally. Still under such a literal construction the terms of the will *had* been broken, and I did not feel sure of my ground. Of one thing I was sure, however, and that was they could make her any amount of trouble and bitterness on the strength of it—and possibly put her under restraint—especially considering the closet episode; there was no telling how they might twist and turn that. In any case it could do no harm to let him think he had things in his own hands.

"And will you use your power in this way?"

"That rests with you, Herr Doktor."

"Then it will not be done. Pray explain further."

"Have Paulo Tomanovich released and set free without prejudice, and I will keep forever silent about this afternoon."

Have Paulo set free and acquitted! How was I to do that? What the Commandant had protested

he could not do? I was compelled to smile at the absurdity of it.

"And pray, how am I, an unimportant foreign stranger, to accomplish that?"

"The main thing is that you be willing. I happen to see the possibility—the ready possibility—clearly enough."

"I assure you I would be perfectly willing if I saw any way. I would have been willing in any case, even if we had no bargain."

"Yes—perhaps. But I believe our bargain will make you a little more earnest—will make you a little readier to take certain steps which may not be exactly agreeable to you."

"Very well, sir. What are the steps?"

"You can accomplish the task through Sbutega. Do you realize that you have him in your power, Herr Doktor? Do you know that with the knowledge you have, he is bound to obey any reasonable request from you? Or even an unreasonable one? Sbutega can release Paulo. And you can command him in the matter."

This view had never entered my head, and caused me to think—hard. For me to "command" the banker, was, of course, not to be thought of. But I could prefer a "request" and I did not doubt but that he would heed it,—even a more unreasonable one than this. He had acknowledged his obligation to me, and had arranged to come to my assistance at any time and place in Austria, in the future. That assistance could be asked now, as well as later. Other possibilities than that which the priest had in mind dimly suggested themselves.

"I do not believe that the little I know would force his hand, sir," I said, with conviction.

"I know that it would. I do not know just what

the messages contained but I have an inkling and know that he would not have it known at any price just now, that any messages at all have been exchanged. Rely upon it!"

"Why not force him yourself?"

"I cannot afford, in my position, to take any part in it. Moreover, I have no proofs. You have. You carried at least one of the messages—I believe you carried the reply. You know how they were received and delivered. We can furinsh you one supporting witness, and perhaps, two, that you were requested to carry them, and that arrangements therefore were made. Besides, he owes you a return for that service—for I feel sure that you did not perform it for a money consideration. He would probably set Paulo free at your request, as a return service. The detention of Paulo is of no value to him. Paulo knows nothing of his Pan-Servian plots. You can make the proposition to him in that form if you like, and reserve compulsion for a last resort."

"And if it fail?"

"It will not fail, Doctor! Believe me, I know what I am saying."

There was little doubt that Signor Sbutega would release Paulo as a return service, if I asked it. I, also, believed the detention and conviction of Paulo could be of no real service to him. As for revenge, Signor Sbutega could doubtless be brought to see that Paulo had undoubtedly had lesson enough by now. But more than all else, I realized that this was the *only way* that a release of Paulo could be effected for a long time to come, at best. Finally, it was easy to see why the priest so ardently desired his release that he had foregone the splendid opportunity which had presented itself within



the past hour; for Signor Tomanovich doubtless held him responsible for having managed badly. The priest did not wish to quarrel with the Signor, and have the latter, perhaps, seek another partner in a different quarter. Yes, I saw the situation, and with the seeing, it came to me that Signor Sbutega was not the only one who was in "my power" today.

I straightened up and turned on the priest. He no longer looked so towering to me.

"Father Petrus, you have instructed me well—better than you intended, I think."

His face grew black as a thundercloud.

"Ah! You think you see another use for your hold upon the banker, than the release of Paulo?"

"Yes," firmly.

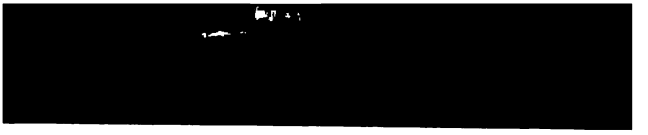
"*Take care,* young man! I have meant well by you so far to-day, but you may find that the banker's is not the only powerful arm in this diocese!"

But he no longer frightened me. I thought I saw my way to the checkmate.

"Before to-day you have not meant well by me, and I do not look upon your sudden conversion as final. When you and Tomanovich have succeeded in stealing the Signorina's estate from her, how large a share is to go to your church?"

I saw him make the necessary effort to control his temper. He succeeded beautifully, but his face was now the color of dough, and remained so.

"And if it were to be one-third, what then, Signor? Will you bid under us and take one-fourth if the Signor drop us and come to you? Or do you mean to make the release of Paulo alone the terms upon which you are to set the Church aside? Don't forget your foresight in thi game. Did you know that the Signorina was once a Roman Catholic



communicant? That church would be glad to get a hold upon the Signorina again. She is a communicant here largely by reason of superior force, and we do not trust her faith. So in order to dispose of *you* we have only to instruct her uncle to allow her to go to that Communion again, and we ourselves step out in their favor. And *they* have the ear of the Austrian government, Doctor Ransome! In that case you will never see a kreutzer of her estate!"

He was playing well, for if I had been after the estate, he would have had me where I should have been compelled to compromise. But as it was, my way still looked clear. Also the reference to Gisela's former Roman Catholicism largely explained why Father Petrus was willing to assist in depriving her of her patrimony—for the mutual hatred is extreme.

"Father Petrus, you have castled without reason, and my knight is still safe from the bishop. I care nothing about the Signorina's estate for myself. I have enough of my own. She could come to me without a heller and be as welcome as if she would have ten times her present estate. Look to your own foresight in this game!"

He regarded me with open skepticism. He smiled a little, then said:

"It is your move, Doctor."

"Very well. Now the situation is thus: You are intriguing with that family against the welfare of the Signorina, in order to cause her to lose the estate, and have it go to the family. When that happy result is attained, you or your church or your monastery is to receive one-third."

"I have not said so," he interrupted.

"In the course of this intrigue you have made a

serious mistake. What you intended for my poor self, has descended upon the son in that family. That you may not have originated that especial plot, will not help you, for you have managed madly and uncleverly. You have lost the Signor's confidence and your influence over him. This you would and must correct. And bringing about the release of Paulo would even put his father under obligations to you.

Finally, that mistake can, as you surmise, be undone through me. Also, Father Petrus, I can *forever prevent* its undoing! Do you understand that? Therefore I have, not Signor Sbutega, but *you* under my thumb today, for I care not a rap about the estate, and am, therefore, not concerned with your threat of the Roman Church!"

"Why, then, Doctor, do you not ask for her without her estate? That would be far simpler."

"I have already done so. With your other eavesdropping this afternoon I am quite sure you heard her last few words to me. She cannot be compelled either to marry me, or to let her estate go to her cousin."

"Yes. Of course—quite true. I had forgotten that for the moment. Well, Doctor, what do you intend to do?"

"You shall know, as shall the Signorina and rest of the family. I shall have Paulo released"——

"Ah!"

"In three years from now!"

If he had been the color of dough before, he was chalky now—only, his eyes burned luridly. He half clenched his fists and took a step toward me, and I looked about for a weapon. But once more he controlled himself though it cost him a far greater

struggle than before. I could not help but respect his self-government, and envied him the quality.

Finally he was able to say:

"In other words you mean to hold him as a hostage."

"Exactly!"

"For insuring what?"

"That question is an insult to your own intelligence, Father Petrus."

"No, Doctor, for there are at least two possibilities. You may be intending to protect the Signorina Gisela by this manœuvre; but you may also be intending to exact a heavy dot at the time of your marriage."

"I have sufficiently answered questions touching my self-interest. I shall hold Paulo as hostage for the following items:

The Signorina is safely to attain legal age and receive her estate in full.

She is to be permitted to marry at her will, and in that case is to receive her full estate at her majority. If either of these things are safely performed, Paulo will be set free;—otherwise not.

Besides this, if I ever learn of any further attempt at intriguing against her, or of any coercion of her that is not for her good on the part of any of you or any one connected with you, then I shall make you worse terms than this. And if anything happen to the Signorina—as, for example, a death that cannot be explained, then I swear to you, Paulo shall never be free, if I can prevent it!"

"Then you do not propose to fetter the Signorina's own will?"

"I shall not try to protect her against herself, but be assured, if she do anything that is not for her good, I shall take care to be convinced that she

did act by her own free will, before Paulo shall be set free! And now, this concludes our interview, does it not?"

He seemed to regard me with a certain respect and great perplexity. He actually accompanied me to the cathedral entrance.

"I hardly know what to think of you, Doctor. It is in your hands to demand a share in this estate, but you seem to throw that consideration utterly away. Am I to take your determination literally?"

"Literally, Father Petrus!"

"We might find a way to act together, Doctor."

"Once more and finally, I seek for myself, only the Signorina's hand in marriage. That, only she herself can give me. Beyond that, the only thing I shall exact for myself is free access to her at reasonable times and places, provided she be willing to see me. You have nothing to do with this. Now for the last time, I warn you that it is best for Paulo that the events of this afternoon be kept a secret."

Then I left him to have an immediate interview with the banker, Sunday though it was. He received me in his drawing room.

"It will take a mint of money to carry this thing out as you wish, Doctor! It would be simple enough to set free, or on the other hand to convict and hold him for good. But to hold him three years and then guarantee his release, means buying a pardon for a state criminal. It can be done—but it will be costly!"

"What will it cost?"

"As much at least as the Church would have got!"

"I'll bear the half of it, Signor. I would offer

to bear all if I could. If the time ever come when I can, I shall repay you the balance."

He looked at me affectionately. Then he rose and clapped his strong old hand on my shoulder.

"I'll pay the bill, my boy! It might be too much for you, and I shall not notice it. It shall be done exactly as you wish. Hereafter, the fate of the young man is in your hands. It has done me a world of good to hear how you got the best of that old rascal Petrus! That has not happened often—not even with me," and he laughed loud and long. "It was worth the money!"

At the door he said:

"I love a man, especially a young man, who does not love money! That may seem a strange speech, coming from me, but the truth is, I do not love money. I only love the pursuit of it—the strenuous conflict for it—as the general loves the winning of his battles—as the player loves the winning of his game. The dross itself is nothing to me; but if another man take it from me I would have him do it either because he is better at the game, or because he has given value in return. You won the price of your wish in your dealing with Petrus. How long are you going to stay? What! Going so soon? Don't leave the dove too long alone on her nest! Be sure and call upon us before you go. A rivederci, Doctor!"

NOTE.—The reader must understand that the case of Father Petrus was a very exceptional one. A property intrigue of this character is not more often indulged in by an Oriental-Orthodox *priest* than by ultra Protestant ministers, and the opportunities are about equally rare in both cases. Indeed the Orthodox *pastors* are more than usually disinterested and naïvely unselfish.

But Petrus was not the regular pastor of the cathedral at Cattaro, who, by reason of precarious health, had in-

definite leave of absence. Petrus was a monk of the order of St. Sava—and a monk is another matter. This distinction has, perhaps been too seldom made in connection with other churches. Besides, Petrus was further influenced in his devious course by his doubt as to Gisela's orthodoxy—a doubt which was abundantly justified, as the reader will learn later. The disfavor with which he would look upon a large property passing from a supposedly orthodox family into the hands of one whom he suspected of being a "heretic," can be accepted as his real keynote.

CHAPTER XVI

I MANUFACTURED no fool's paradise for myself out of the situation. I believed I had put an effectual block upon their intriguing and so far the work was good. But I had left Gisela a free choice. The significance of the priest's comment to that effect had not escaped me.

But I could not have done otherwise, and what this might mean could only be left to the future. I believed, however, that her intense hatred of her cousin would protect her from any act which they could use,—now that she would be a free agent. In any case, if she should lose her estate by a voluntary act of her own, I could not prevent it, nor would I care.

As for my own interest—I had still to win her. That did not seem so near, now, for while I had readily condoned her angry words in the Cathedral, nevertheless I did not try to deceive myself any longer as to their significance. If she had really loved me, I felt she could not have uttered them. Nor had she, as yet, positively, said she loved me. Her answer to this question had only been the best one she could give—and had been honest, at least.

I had, moreover, a very disagreeable task to perform. I really liked the Signor and it was no pleasant duty to have to inform him that his son must remain three years in confinement, as a hostage controlling his efforts against his own ward. For fear that I should meet the mother and perhaps have her break down my resolve, I made up

my mind not to go to the house again. So I dispatched a letter to the Signor asking him to call upon me.

I made this arrangement partly for the additional reason that I did not wish to seem to seek Gisela. I was not angry, but her words had been uncompromising, and I would wait to see if she repented of them sufficiently to seek me out. If she did not I could set her uneasiness at rest by explaining the situation to Teresa, at my opportunity. For the rest, Harry and I began to get our scattered things together in order to leave for the north as soon as my commissions should be executed. My letter to the Signor was posted Sunday evening. By Monday afternoon Harry and I were ready to go, but I had received no reply from him.

The following afternoon near five o'clock I was sitting alone over a cup of coffee in the Dojmi when Enrico brought me a letter. He said an answer was awaited. I hurriedly opened it. It read:

"CARO SIGNOR:

It seems a lifetime since I saw you. On account of Paulo's misfortune it is very difficult to leave the house, as the family is in seclusion; but I have thought constantly of you and wished I could see you.

I will not conceal the fact that the family are no longer your friends, and perhaps you would better not come here more; but I am the same as always, Eduard, always the same.

I hope you have not forgotten the pretty little arrangement we planned when we last met. I have not, I assure you. I hope nothing will interrupt it, for it would be my greatest misfortune now, to lose all communication with you.

Do you know, Signor, when I was a little girl they used to call me just 'Cara.' It is shortened from 'Carissima.' I was never called by my proper name until I was almost grown. They no longer use it now. I would like to hear it from you if we meet, and see it when you write to me. Please answer this, so I'll know that everything is well between us.

I hear you are going soon. I wish I could see you first but I am afraid it will not do here at home. Perhaps a way will be found. I think of you every day.

Your

CARA."

It was a queer little letter! And not a reference to our last words in the Cathedral! But she did not know, yet, that she need no longer fear the consequences of that occurrence, and would not risk a reference to it in writing. Still, I wished there had been one little word—one little hidden phrase, which I alone would have understood, which spoke of regret.

But I pulled myself up short. The letter itself was a sufficient expression of regret. "Our pretty little arrangement," of course, referred to our plan to exchange letters through the bank. Of course the principal object of the letter was the warning not to come to the house. She did not know, yet that I would take no risk in coming over. Now that she had written, I determined to see her once more, and in her own home.

"Who brought this letter, Enrico?"

"An olda woman—one of the servants of Signor Tomanovich, Dottor."

Teresa, of course.



"Where is she, Enrico?"

"She say she waita by Cattedral. She say you musta not come, Dottor. I bring letter to her."

I could understand her caution in the light of the knowledge she had. Well, it was warm and I would send the answer by Enrico. He was as trustworthy as she. Enrico brought writing materials, and I answered the letter.

"My Own Dearest Cara:

The dear little pet name is new to me, but I have repeated it many times by now and already I am growing to love it, because, from your letter, I know that I, only, am to use it.

Of course I know the Signor hates me now, but I shall be in no danger in coming over. I'll explain all when I see you.

So you think of me every day? I think of you every hour and minute. Cara, dearest Cara, I think of nothing else these days.

Indeed, I have not forgotten our 'pretty little arrangement.' We will carry it out. We are safe anyway now, Cara, but the little plan is still best, for various reasons. Also it will be the dearest way we shall have, for a long time to come, for me to tell you I love you, and for you to tell me the same thing—if you will.

I do not think the Signor will trouble us. I have my reasons for that belief and will tell you what they are when I see you. We shall likewise be safe from the Ingenieur. I no longer fear him, nor need you. Be tranquil. I have arranged all.

I am sorry for Paulo, but it was his own work. He has himself to thank for his situation. I knew nothing about it until I saw him arrested.

Of course it is all right between us. When has it been otherwise, so far as I am concerned?

And now, dearest Cara, be afraid no longer. Remember that I love you. Something has happened that has placed it entirely in my power to smoothe our way. Once more again, you need fear no longer either the Signor or the Ingenieur. We can love one another if you will, dearest Cara. Only that is lacking now; the *if you will.*

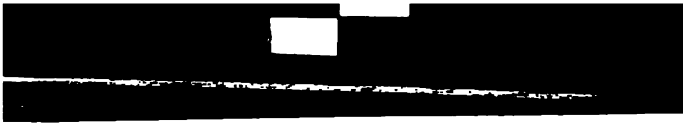
A rivederci, dearest Cara.

Your

EDWARD."

After Enrico had gone with the reply, I read the little letter over and over again. She wrote a beautiful hand and lovely German and I kissed the pretty letter (cautiously of course, for the place was public) from one end of the missive to the other. And it was a dear little confidence between us—that little name which should be used only by us. Cara! And it was appropriate. I could always use that little name with no lack of its full meaning.

The world seemed bright again. I should have to wait three years for her, but what did that matter? She had a passionate nature and the idea foremost in her mind dominated her for the time being, but her letter convinced me that she really loved me, after all. I believed in her constancy in every direction, and now that she loved me she would be constant to that. For the first time since I had seen her on St. John's evening I breathed the fresh warm air freely and with an easy mind.



CHAPTER XVII

By Wednesday noon I had had no word from the Signor, and I decided to go over that afternoon. I sent a note by messenger to the Signor acquainting him with my intention. For various reasons I was too impatient to sit still in a boat for the necessary time to cross over the gulf, and hired a saddle horse to go around by the road, starting about four.

I was not long on my way before I found that the liveryman had played me a very common trick—that is, he had let me have a half-broken horse. He was a fine, big, powerful jet black gelding and I soon had my hands full. Fortunately the afternoon was not so hot as usual, and the road was fine. The chief concern of the gelding seemed, for the present, to be merely to go, as fast as I would let him,—and I let him; only keeping him just on the bit, paying no attention to the stares of the lazy loiterers on the road.

At Perzagno I could find no place to stable the lathered animal and have him properly cooled off, and was directed to the first end of Stolivo where I would find a place for him. I had been too busy to observe the Signor's house as I passed, for just at this place the gelding bolted at an orange peel and I did not get him steadied for nearly a half a mile of very crooked road. I passed Le Tre Sorelle and finally came to the place to which I had been directed. Sincerely regretting now, that I had brought the animal, I gave him in charge of a stableman who informed me that no one would be there if I came late, and that I would have to

saddle up for myself. He showed me where a lantern and matches were to be found.

When, coming back afoot, I saw the Signor's residence again, I noticed two men on the veranda in whom, as I came up the path, I recognized the Signor and the Ingenieur. They rose and bowed gravely but neither offered his hand.

"Be seated, Herr Doktor Ransome," said the Signor, "we were expecting you by water and had about given you up. We were quite surprised to see you go by on horseback."

"That is a spirited animal you were riding," said the Ingenieur. "He is fine! I think he must be pure Hungarian. I saw him going on both sides of the road at once down there. Who's is it?"

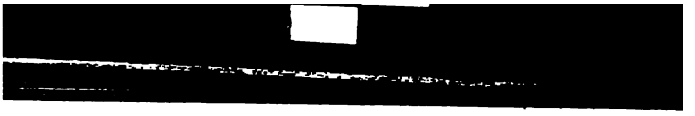
But the preliminary conversation was short and halting. I had the feeling that neither of them would have endured it at all if the courtesy of their own house had not demanded it. I decided to shorten my errand all I could. Accordingly, with an apology to the Ingenieur, I asked the Signor for a private conversation. The Ingenieur rose and excused himself. After he disappeared the Signor himself began.

"I think I know what you have to say to me, Doktor Ransome. Father Petrus was here Sunday evening and stated that you and he had met in the church. He has explained the state of affairs. I understand that you will hold my son as a hostage. Is there more to say?"

"Do you fully understand my terms, Signor?"

"Oh, I believe so. My niece is to attain her majority safely and then receive the whole of her estate. Is not that it?"

"Or if she elect to marry before then, she is to be allowed to do so within reason. And I am to



have access to her at reasonable times and places. She is to have a free will in the meantime, in any direction which is usual in the case of a woman of her position in life."

"Yes. That was all stated to me also. Well?"

"That is all, Signor. Now, if you please, I will see your niece a móment or two and then say good-bye to you all."

"Gisela will not see you, Herr Doktor."

"Have a care, Signor! I can"——

"Do you, on your side, have a care, Doktor Ransome!" he thundered. "Understand now, once for all, that no member of this family will ever ask quarter at your hands! You are going to keep my son in confinement for three years. Very well! We, as a family, accept the terms. I shall not even offer you my bond,—my word of honor—or any other thing, to get him free. I know he would not have it if he could be consulted. He shall serve out the time. Afterwards he will settle the debt with you!"

He was purple, but spoke the latter sentences low and between his teeth.

"Have you had word from Paulo himself that he will settle with me?"

"Certainly not! How could that occur? But he will be no son of mine if he does not have a reckoning with you!"

"Very well! I am forewarned, and shall take steps accordingly. Now, do you forbid me to see your niece? Yes, or no!"

"I have not said that I forbade it. I said she would not see you. Her room is at the end of the veranda. She is within. You are perfectly welcome to ask admittance. If she will see you, it is nothing to me. And, Doktor, we at last under-

stand one another. Hereafter, when you come to my house, if you elect to do so, it will be only to see my niece. The rest of us will beg you to excuse us. I do not speak for Signor Ober-Leutnant Overmann, of course. Adieu, Doktor Ransome."

He made a stately bow and passed into the door.

I called him. I did not intend to argue with him further but it was necessary that he fully understand.

"Signor,—just one word more. I have understood you, but you have clearly not fully understood the situation yet. It is true, Signor, that I mean to have Paulo liberated after three years, if all goes well with your niece. But, Signor, I am telling you the mere truth when I assure you that it would be far simpler to keep your son in durance for the rest of his life, than to liberate him after three years!"

He bowed once more, and I returned the courtesy. Then I walked down the veranda and rapped upon Gisela's door. At first there was no answer, and I began to think she had been spirited away. However, in answer to a third and imperious knock she opened the door and faced me.

I had expected something different from what I saw in her face. It wore the same expression it had when she had visited upon me her last two speeches in the Cathedral. I could find no words.

"Well, Doctor Ransome, what do you wish with *me?*"

"Sweetheart, what is"——

"Don't you *dare* utter that word to me! You are false!—falser than the very Shades themselves! I will never hear a word from your lying tongue again! Never let me see your false, hypocritical face more! Go! Go to my cousin! You were *made*



for one another and it would be *a sin* to keep you apart! Go!"

She closed the door firmly and sharply, and I was alone on the veranda.

It must be realized that I had kept my temper only with difficulty in my conversation with her uncle; so it had already been very near the firing-point when I had gone to her door. Under such circumstances my surprise at her reception gave way to a settled and lasting anger. I did not understand, but I did not try. If her moods were no more reliable than this, I said to myself, I were well rid of her. Well, and good! She should, in fact, never see my face again! I strode down the veranda and without a backward look went down the walk and out onto the road, taking my way to Stolivo.

It was now dark, and I was hoping that the devil I had to ride would be tired enough to behave himself. Having arrived at the stable I lighted a lantern and went in. The gelding leveled a kick at me which barely missed, and I leveled one at him which did not miss. After a battle I got him saddled, got on his back and started. He bolted twice and then steadied up a bit. He was splendidly gaited, and once he was tamed would be a delight to ride. There was no moon but the night was clear and the stars were doing their best. I held the beast a little and he took a comfortable single-foot. I could see every inch of the white road way, and would have found the ride a delight had my thoughts been other than they were.

As we came up to Le Tre Sorelle I took a last look at the ruin. It looked grim and forbidding in the star-light and I was glad to turn my eyes forward again. As we came even with the house I saw a flash of light and thought I heard a call, and



"As we came to the ruin, I saw a flash of light."
(Accursed Roccos.)

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the horse instantly bolted and we were far down the road before I got him pulled up. He danced all over the road and onto the rock-piers and tried once more to bolt homeward. Who had called? It had sounded like my name and had seemed to come from the ruin itself!—Pshaw!

Convinced that I had been the victim of a perfervid imagination, I allowed the horse to go. After a few more shies and bolts he settled down to his work, and we flew along the fine curving road. I realized his beautiful gait and was conscious of a wish to become his owner; but such thoughts soon passed, and my mind settled upon the Tomanovich family again.

Gisela had shown herself utterly unworthy of my efforts to protect her. Why should I put the banker to such an immense expense on her account? I resolved to release him from his promise. It was not worth while. On my side, why should I encumber myself with a heritage of hatred and perhaps a vendetta for a woman who had evidently been merely amusing herself with me? "Lying tongue! False, hypocritical face! Made for her cousin!" These words were but her means for closing the chapter! Harry had indeed known what he was talking about! The banker and Enrico were the only Italians I had found here who were not false, and with this thought my resolve to release the banker from his obligation to hold Paulo became iron. I would let him do what he himself pleased to do with the young man. I would wash my hands of it all.

I carried out the last named resolve the following morning. The banker seemed surprised, but asked me no questions. He bade me a most cordial good-



bye, and once more reminded me of the letter which he had given me in case of need.

Harry and I took the noon boat and about half past one we passed out of the Bocche into the Adriatic.

There comes to us, sometimes an acme of misery which has so far passed endurance as to bring about a positive relief; that is, there comes a time when the healthy brain will respond to sadness no longer, and rebounds. It was so with me now. As the ship settled upon her northerly course I watched the Punta d'Ostro close in upon the Punta d'Arza as *my* closing of the chapter; and began to pace the deck, and to inhale the sea breeze, and to turn my mind forwards instead of backwards.

PART II

(AFTER TWO YEARS)





PART II

(AFTER TWO YEARS)

CHAPTER I

FOR a time, after returning finally to Vienna, I heard at intervals from Signor Sbutega; but nothing happened, and after some months his letters ceased, the only occurrence of interest during the interval being the ultimate release of Paulo, which was effected about eight months after his arrest. I never troubled to inquire how it came about. The banker had written that Paulo had acquitted me of having placed the papers in his coat, he asserting that no such act on my part had been possible, and some days later I received a short letter from the Signor apologizing for the accusation, though he had not uttered the words to me. I acknowledged this and the matter was closed.

From Gisela I received no line or message. I never forgot her, but little by little, as the busy months flew by, Time drew his charitable and kindly veil and Gisela became a memory to be recalled now and then in an idle or lonely hour.

When I had arrived in Vienna, the first thing I

saw in my rooms was the express package containing the old violin. At that time, the sight of it had caused an ugly pang. What should I do with it? I had promised to keep it and never let it go to any hand but her own. Of course, I could have returned it, and of course the reason I did not, was a sub-conscious unwillingness to break the very last thread which connected me with the woman I had loved so well. Had this reason not been sub-conscious, I would have returned it, promptly. The result was that without removing the packing in which it had come, without even looking to see if the instrument had arrived in safety, I stored the package in an empty trunk in the attic of the house where my apartments were, and it was more than three long years before my eyes rested upon it again.

Of Lubitza's coming we never had any news. I assumed that she had gone elsewhere.

Harry, having nothing to forget, resumed his regular daily round of work at once. In three days he had quarreled bitterly with his professor about how much the thumb of his bow-hand should be bent while playing, and about straight bowing in general, for, like his great Belgian master, he had a sweeping lack of respect for this generally accepted rule, his bow swinging gracefully from side to side and bearing on the strings anywhere between the bridge and an inch beyond the end of the fingerboard. Yet he had a great tone and never scratched. However, either Harry had really grown a little more settled or his Viennese master was a little more indulgent or diplomatic, for he remained with his professor and worked faithfully and hard. He progressed with a rapidity almost beyond belief, and his professor one day informed me con-

fidentially that he meant to give Harry his début in half the time he had promised.

I did not see Harry every day but we foregathered Sundays. By tacit consent the subjects of Cattaro and its people were taboo.

I am now taking up my account at a period of nearly two years after my parting with Gisela. The summer at Cattaro, while not forgotten, had become veiled.

Therefore nothing could have been more unwelcome than any recalling of it. That, however, was destined to occur.

Early in February a new star burst in brilliance upon the operatic world. She had made her début as Lucia in Berlin, and was pronounced a coloratura the like of which had come into the world but once or twice before. Report had it that she had studied in Italy and later had worked in Vienna, Dresden and Berlin. Report had it also that "the Tomaso's" life was as tinted as her singing, and this consideration alone was enough to advertise her favorably in Vienna. Her name was connected with no special persons, but many particulars of her gay disposition were related, and her name was a sweet morsel on the tongue of every man-about-town in the city.

The demand upon our operatic management for her appearance in the Royal opera grew more and more insistent with every new report of her triumphs in the north, and her pictures, in different poses and costumes, began to filter by the hundred into shop windows and drawing-rooms everywhere. At last, as our operatic seaon was nearing its close we heard that she was to appear here shortly for a few evenings, as a starring guest of our manage-



ment ("gastieren") and that she had been regularly engaged here for the following year.

Of course I had recognized Lubitza in these pictures displayed everywhere, but her re-appearance on my horizon did not trouble me at first; moreover, although I had not heard a word about her during her studies, her final appearance was, of course, no matter for surprise. I gave her signal and prompt success a passing thought, and then forgot her again. She had never interested me. It was not until she had actually sung in Vienna and Harry had brought his unbounded enthusiasm home to my rooms that I woke up and realized that we would,—must,—meet, directly or indirectly, at some time or other.

Harry was effervescent over her, and discussed critically and at great length her tone-placing, breadth and sweetness of tone, accurate intonation in every most difficult passage, and also her fine acting, to all of which I listened in moody silence.

I did not hate Lubitza, for the reader will remember that so far as I knew I had no reason to do so on any personal grounds. She had been pretty to me—and very patient, even. Any feeling I had against Lubitza was purely on Gisela's account. Lubitza had hated Gisela—but Gisela had likewise hated Lubitza. There was left, then, only Lubitza's intriguing against her cousin, and I was inclined to hold her own father much more for that, than herself. For her feeling against Gisela, personally, I could not altogether condemn her. I had learned to my cost that Gisela was not without fire of her own.

So it was not by reason of hatred or dislike for Lubitza that I regretted her coming here, and was wishing Harry would leave off, but because this

new event was stirring up dregs which I wished to remain settled.

I suppose Harry discoursed for an hour or more going over every detail of the opera he had heard the previous evening and contrasting her work with that of other favorite artists. After a long concluding panegyric he informed me that she was to sing in "Hoffman's Tales" the following Saturday night, and commanded me to go.

"No! By the Lord, no!" And I got up and began to pace the floor. I threw up a window and drank in a little of the fresh cold air. Then I closed it and sat down again. I wished, for once, that Harry would go. He watched me in silent reproach, as usual, when bothered, hunched up in his chair. He got up as if to go—then reconsidered and reseated himself to study me some more. Finally he said, in a patient sort of tone:

"Ed, this is not like you. I remember pretty well what occurred summer before last, and I can't think of anything Lubitza did which ought to make you feel like this. That is, if you told me everything."

"Oh, you knew all there was, Harry."

"Leave old bones buried, Ed! The times and circumstances have changed. I believe she is a different woman now."

"Yes! I have heard so!" I remarked grimly. "The Tomaso has not been mentioned in my hearing as an innocent home girl!"

"Oh, come, Ed! I don't believe that slanderous rot. There is talk about almost every woman on the stage. Half of it is advertising dodge. Besides, she wasn't exactly *innocent* when she was at home."

"I don't understand these things but Count



Weyer once told me that a prude who tried to succeed on the stage was like a six-year-old trying to ride a bucking horse. Some six-year-olds might stick on for one buck, but not many. I do not fancy Lubitza has had to overcome many obstacles. She has been pushed;—not held back. Besides, there must be something in all this talk about her. There is too much of it. Again, I happen to know —since you have reminded me—that Lubitza had just the stuff in her to make such a woman."

"Well, what business is that of ours, Ed? To us she is only the artist!"

"But you are not speaking for her as merely the artist—you are counseling me to forget the summer before last, Harry. Have you talked with her?"

"Not yet. I have only had a little smile from her as I sat in the audience,—when she was recalled. But, Ed, there is a difference between a prude on the stage and a woman who can be a good fellow but still able to steer her ship. I believe she can."

"As an operatic singer, I'll grant it. She has done it."

"As a woman, also. What was the meaning of your remark that she had the stuff in her to make such a woman?"

But this was the one thing I had not told Harry. I had not thought it was fair play to do so. I had based the remark upon the conversation which had occurred at the gate the first day Gisela had refused to see me, and the grounds for my opinion were just. Nevertheless, I did not blame Harry for finding my refusal unsatisfactory.

"It seems that I do *not* know all, then."

"You know everything that occurred. I am reserving only one private conversation."

"Oh, well, then, let her be what she will in her private life! I don't care a rap, and neither does anybody else. The public never cares anything about that sort of thing. Artists are not expected to go in harness like the draft horses. Since when have you become so damned moral?"

"You are wide of the mark, Harry. It is simply that I don't wish to have summer before last recalled by *her!*"

"Yes," he answered slowly. "I see your point at last. Forgive me, Ed. But I was thinking that that was all dead now. I have been very dull!"

"So it is;—dead. But I don't care to meet Lubitza all the same."

"I understand. But it is a great pity, Ed, that you won't go and hear her. She will not be Lubitza on the stage Saturday night, but the doll Olympia, the courtesan Giulietta, and the stricken Antonia. And she is an artist—a great artist. It is due your own education to hear her at least once. She will sing all three rôles, and they say she has never yet been equaled in this opera. The orchestra will be enlarged, Leutzmann is to sing Hoffmann and Kuntze will read the score. Don't miss the best thing this year! I'll get tickets from the artists' allotment. You couldn't buy one at the box office tomorrow. I'll come for you. Be ready at six."

He was already half way down the hallway. I called out:

"See that the tickets are not near the stage, otherwise I go into the stehplatz—or out!"

"All right, Ed," he called back.

And go I did, with many inward misgivings, fearing too many reminders of the past, coupled with a



not unnatural interest and curiosity. And it was not long after the opera began that I forgot objections and misgivings and all else save the beautiful work upon the stage and the artists in their title rôles. For Harry's enthusiasm had had every ground. "The Tomaso" *was* an artist—a great artist, and held her audience spellbound. I forgot all prejudices and scruples, forgot that she was Lubitza, forgot that I had ever known or seen her before, and did not think of it again even during the recalls. After the last curtain I remained with Harry and the other enthusiasts giving my hearty meed of applause until the lights were turned out on us, and we *had* to go.

"Well," said Harry, "was I right? Who would have thought that Lubitza had all that in her!"

"Hush, Harry. I have not heard Lubitza tonight. I have heard 'the Tomaso'—and I don't want to forget her."

CHAPTER II

BUT after two weeks a new matter engaged the attention of both Harry and myself to the present exclusion of all else, even "the Tomaso," and again I forgot her for the time being.

The new matter was none other than Harry's début. One evening he said:

"Ed, if that old violin of yours only had its original tone!"

His own instrument, a Bergonzi, did not have the power required for principal playing with full orchestra, and I had prepared a surprise for him. From the son of a well-known luthier in Germany, a personal friend of mine, I had secretly borrowed a "Strad" for the occasion and this evening I handed it to him. He took one look at it, then disappeared for a practice far into the night in defiance of the ten o'clock law. He forgot to thank me. I had expected he would overlook that mere detail.

The eventful evening finally arrived and found me in an end seat of the sixth row in the parquette of the Grosser Musik-Vereins Saal, awaiting his first number with keen interest but no anxiety for I knew Harry was well prepared and would be troubled by no embarrassment. The hall was filled by a smartly dressed crowd and evidently all was well at the box office end.

When Harry appeared his case was half won at once. His fine tall figure, no longer so lanky now, his handsome face and full wavy iron-rust locks produced their sensation as many an exclamation from pretty lips round about me abundantly testi-



fied. His first number was the extremly difficult concerto by Tschaikowsky and when he first drew bow across that Strad his conquest was complete.

During an orchestral interlude near the end of the concerto I caught his eye and smiled happily. He raised his bow slightly and I took this as an acknowledgement. I cannot convey in words my pleasure and pride in seeing my friend and fellow-countryman score such a success among these hypercritical musical people right upon their own ground, and in a domain which is their own pet pride.

Again twice during the Mendelssohn concerto he caught my eye and raised his bow, and now I understood that he was pointing with it. I hastily looked over the part of the hall indicated and finally spied Lubitza. She was bent a little forward in her chair, her face of a high color, her eyes wide, drinking in every note from the player and seeing naught else. I remembered immediately that this was the first time she had heard Harry's playing. If her attitude and expression meant anything at all it meant that I should never be troubled by her again, and I sank back in my seat better satisfied than ever. I forgot that Lubitza was an artist, and ever at her best when concerned with anything pertaining to her art;—for in this, at least, she was always absolutely unselfish. And I forgot that Gisela had told me that Lubitza was prone to want what she could not have. At the conclusion of the Mendelssohn number I looked again and saw her standing up wildly applauding, with her eyes on the door into the artists' room, and all unconscious of it, with her own circle of admirers in that part of the audience round about her. Yes, in musical art she was unselfish. She was giving unstinted

praise to the art of another, and she looked better to me than ever before, even than in "Hoffman's Tales." I gave her full credit for the one fine thread which by chance had gone into her weaving.

At the conclusion of the Brahm's Concerto came that pretty sight which is seen whenever any great violinist is heard in Vienna. Many of the Conservatoristen all young players and many of them young girls, gathered at the very foot of the stage to have a closer study of the soloist's technique during the recalls. I saw Lubitza work her way through these to that end of the stage where the artists' door was. An official stood there to bar entrance, but he stood aside for her. She ascended to that wing of the stage where a large body of Conservatoristen were, and these literally enfolded her in a composite embrace. Clearly she had been unselfish with them, too.

At this juncture some one tapped me on the shoulder, and turning I found Count Weyer-Reinbach by my side. I had just time to greet him warmly when Harry, obeying his third recall, came now, with his violin. With his feet encircled by a mass of rapt young faces he played a nocturne by Ernst. His purity of style and broad, great tone showed here to the greatest advantage.

During the following uproar the Count said:

"Your friend has his way clear before him now. Still, remember, that the musical critics of the press require a certain sweetening other than the sweet sounds of a fiddle. *You* know" (and he nudged me), "the sound of clink—clink."

"Oh, Count!" I laughed, "I believe they are all honest!"

"Sleep if you like, but don't let your friend sleep —by the way, is not that 'the Tomaso' up there?—



I thought so. She is a true artist. I wish I knew somebody who could introduce me."

Nothing had been further from my intentions than any hunting up of Lubitza. I was perfectly willing for this star to shine for me from afar. But here was a chance at last to oblige the Count, and I was in his debt for many courtesies. It was the first chance I had ever had to do him a real favor. I hesitated, but the sense of obligation would not down.

Besides, why should I not? What had she ever done to me except to try to flatter me the best she knew how? And to-night I had the feeling that she would trouble me no more. A little of curiosity there was, too. I will not attempt to deny it.

"Well, Count, it happens, fortunately, that I can oblige you—if not tonight, at some other time."

"What! You know her? You are blessed! Why, Doctor Ransome, I have been casting about in that direction ever since she first came, without any luck!"

"But, Count, what will the Graefin say? I don't want to get on the wrong side of her!"

"No fear! The Graefin is a wise woman. She knows she has my best, and doesn't trouble her head about my worst. And she knows it wouldn't do any good if she did. So she draws the line at the house door, only."

"Liberal bounds, surely! Well, as soon as Harry's recalls are over we will go into the artists' room and see him. I think she also is planning to go in. Harry will introduce you. He knows her better than I do."

"She is a handsome woman. Who was she anyhow? Tomaso is a stage name, is it not?"

We were hissed into silence by people round

about. It was rather welcome, as I preferred to let the Count find out about Lubitza for himself.

At last, after the fifth recall number, Harry came out and smilingly shook his head. The lights began to go out, patch by patch, and the Count and I pushed our way toward the end of the stage.

"Can you get us by that fellow there?" I asked.

"What? That block-head? See me do it!" He smilingly took the sentinel by the shoulders and pushed him aside. The man, recognizing him, laughingly bowed, and we were soon in the artists' room.

An enthusiastic gathering was already there, all trying to shake Harry's hand at once, and all chattering at once, and it was some moments before he saw us. We saw Lubitza go up to him. She threw her arms about his neck, drew his head down and kissed him on the cheek. The company applauded.

"Ah!" said the Count, "I see the proof of former acquaintanceship signed, sealed and delivered! What a mistake in life I have made! I should have studied the violin!"

"What, Count? Struck hard?"

"From the first!"

"Well, let us lose no further time for fear a fire break out! Come on."

We pushed through the mob. Harry saw us and shouted a jovial welcome. Lubitza turned, saw me, and grasped both of my hands. As Harry and the Count exchanged courtesies, I found time to whisper to her:

"You have made a serious conquest,"—and I indicated the Count with my eyes. She looked at him and made a face.

"Are those your first words to me?" she asked.

"Yes, but not my first thoughts. I do not see

'the Tomaso' for the first time tonight. When you sing I am just like everybody else in Vienna—your slave."

She rapped my ear with her lorgnette.

"We shall see. Who is your friend?"

"Count Weyer-Reinbach."

"Oh! Yes, I remember, we heard"—and snapped her mouth shut, and reddened. She had not meant to remind me of Cattaro.

I waited, smiling.

"Yes, I have heard that some Count or other was trying to meet me. Married?"

"Oh, yes."

"Faugh! I have grown sick of married men! Let them go to their own nests!"

"The Count is an old and good friend of both Harry and myself. You must allow us to present him, Signorina."

"Very well—but I'll have none of him!"

"That is not nominated in the bond," I answered laughing. "Besides yours is not the only conquest tonight. I saw you worshipping Harry out there."

"*Certainly!* Did not everybody? He deserved it. When are you coming to see me? And why have you waited so long?"

But I did not have to answer, for at this juncture Harry came up with the Count and presented him. I found time to wring Harry's paw and to repeat some of the things I had heard said that evening round about me, before Lubitza and the Count turned to us.

"By the bye, Signorina, where is Herr Ober-Leutnant Overmann?" asked Harry.

"In Trebinje. He is to be here Wednesday and hear me in 'Barbiere.'. On Thursday evening I am going to have a dinner in my apartments. You are

all invited. There will be more gentlemen than ladies. Do you mind?"

"You are enough for at least six," said the Count.

"Only if they have the brains of one!"

"That is more than the average! You have been used to good company. Thank you, Fräulein, for your invitation."

"A thousand welcomes, Herr Graf. I shall expect you all by nine sharp. Frau Eisenauer-Baker does not like to be kept waiting for her dinner."

"Ah, is *she* to be there?" asked the Count. "She is enough for at least two."

'There will be enough to go around, then."

In an aside to me:

"He is *fifty!*"

"No, he has a number of years to go before that, Signorina."

His sharp ears caught my words.

"Quite right, Doctor. And reckoning by deeds you are older than I, Fräulein Tomaso!"

"I am not sure about that!"

The Count elevated shoulders and eyebrows.

"You see, Herr Graf, your reputation has preceded you. I fear my maid will think she has missed me and may go on home. Auf wiedersehen."

The Count saw her to her carriage and I waited while Harry had his accounting with the manager. As we were driving to his house, I remarked:

"Lubitza was hanging on the tones of your violin like a girl on the words of her lover!"

"And the first thing she asked me was where you were, and if you were there tonight. Lubitza is not in love with *me*, Ed! She is an artist; that is her whole interest in *me*. But she was very



earnest in her inquiry for you. Why don't you let the old bones rest and go in and have a circus with her? That is what *she* wants!"

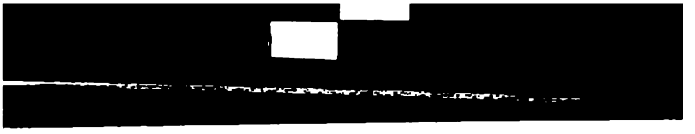
"I'll turn that delicate matter over to the Count —since you are not interested," I replied.

CHAPTER III

WHEN we were admitted to the Tomaso's anteroom on Thursday evening we found that all of the men invited had arrived. The Ingenieur was not among them, but I presumed he was somewhere in the house.

Besides the Count, Harry and I, there was among others, a certain Baron Ascher, one of the gayest and most free men-about-town in Vienna. He had divorced two wives (or maybe they had him; I do not really know), and his affairs, shall we say of the heart, were notorious and gossiped about in every circle. Of the other men I knew little or nothing. They were Sectionschef Raeder, Herr Abgeordnete Stein (member of the Lower House), an attaché to the Italian Embassy, and a Mr. Mueller. Of the latter I had heard a little. He had recently come into a large estate. The Ingenieur, if he were here, would make the ninth man.

They were all gossiping in knots. The Count cornered me at once and began to ask again the unanswered questions begun at the concert, with many others. The Baron's knot gathered Harry in. It did seem a bad case on the part of the Count and I was sharply put to it to avoid a pitfall. I did not like this gossiping about the hostess in her own house, Lubitza though it was, and as I caught Harry's expressive eye I saw he was of my opinion. However, we were not among the guests originally invited, but "afterthoughts," and it was not for us to read a lecture to them.



"Who is Frau Eisenauer-Baker?" I asked. "You seemed to know her the other evening."

"She is a very curious character here, and I am surprised you do not know about her, Doctor. She was once the mistress of" (and here he whispered the name of one of the first titled men of the Empire) "and she still wears his diamonds. She"——

"Ah—hh! The 'Baronin La'"——

"The same," he quickly interrupted, "but don't dare let that nick-name slip in her hearing! She attends confessional now, but she is still young enough to try to attract men, and can be good company on occasion. She is very rich. Fräulein Berg is also coming tonight—the dancer, you know. I suppose the Tomaso asked her to please Ascher. He has been seen with her a little lately, but I don't believe there is anything in that—at least not yet. Ascher has"——

"Do you mean the première at the Royal Opera?"

"Yes."

"Forgive my interruption. What were you about to say about Baron Ascher?"

"Only that he has been losing heavily at the club lately and I suspect that his funds for this sort of thing are beginning to run low."

"So much the better if all I have heard about him be true!"

"Oh, I know worse fellows than Ascher, Doctor."

"Pardon. And Fräulein Berg? Is she pretty off the stage?"

"That is a matter of taste. She is a little spitfire! One Sunday afternoon a lot of us were out at Heiligen Kreuz and a certain"——

We were all interrupted and brought onto our

feet by a gay laugh. Lubitza stood between the portières.

"Gossiping just like a lot of women! Stop your scandal mongering and come into dinner!"

"We were talking about the best thing of the year!" asserted the attaché.

"What is that?"

"You."

She seized him by the ear and led him into the room, and the rest gayly followed. The two other women and the Ingenieur had already come in.

"Who are not acquainted?" asked Lubitza.

"Herr Doktor, Frau Eisenauer-Baker and Fräulein Berg. Ladies, our new violinist."

The Ingenieur came up and shook hands cordially with Harry and me.

"Fräulein Tomaso, please have the goodness to introduce me to Frau Eisenauer," begged the Baron with mock gravity.

"Yes, Fräulein, the Herr Baron is a new-comer and doesn't know Vienna!" explained the lady in question, in high sarcasm.

"I have seen him before," remarked Fräulein Berg. "He always has a front seat at the opera—and opera glasses! His poor eyesight always distresses us!"

"He was born with the defect," remarked the attaché.

"Come! Take your places, or Frau Eisenauer will leave nothing for us," called Lubitza.

"I shall not eat any of the men!" responded that lady.

Lubitza took the head of the table with the Abgeordnete on her right and the Ingenieur on her left. Frau Eisenauer was already seated at the foot. The Sectionschef was given her right, and the



Baron her left. Mueller and the attaché sat on either side of me, and the dancer with the Count and Harry, opposite. Fräulein Berg could not be called pretty but had the finest figure I had ever seen—displayed at least. She had a bright face, but looked more Polish than Austrian. Before taking her seat she placed her foot upon the table edge and proceeded to tie her shoe. Ascher and the Abgeordnete rushed madly to her aid. Frau Eisenauer rapped upon the table.

"None of that! I won't have it! I shall hold you young people in due bounds."

All screamed in derision. Ascher said:

"Oh, I say, gnädige Frau, do you remember that evening in the Sacher some fifteen years ago when"—(she put her fingers in her ears. He bent closer to her and screamed)—"when there was a bet that a woman couldn't stand on her head, and" ——

Really enraged she jumped up, pushed the Baron into his chair and boxed both of his ears until they were red. She was a big woman and I thought to myself that I would as lief not have those boxes.

"Just my luck—always!" said Ascher, as he ruefully felt his ears.

"I'll have you all know that there never was a word of truth in *that* yarn, anyway!"

"We are obliged to believe you, Gnädige,"—— murmured the attaché, as he edged away a little.

"Pshaw! I do it every day!" asserted Fräulein Berg.

"At what hour?" begged Ascher.

The servants had already presented our first course, and the butler had filled our glasses.

"Come—let's begin," said Lubitza.

The Count rose.

"A health to our hostess!"

All rose, glasses in hand.

"This won't do—these glasses are too small for that toast," objected the Sectionschef.

"Let us drink it in tumblers."

"Or from the bottle," suggested the attaché.

"Her shoe!" called out Müller.

"Shoe! Shoe!" rang out all around.

"Bah! Holds too little!" insisted the attaché.

But he was drowned in the gay clamor. Lubitza laughingly produced her shoe, a bright little high-heeled patent leather affair. The Count took it from her, pulled out an eye-glass and gravely tried to *see* it.

"I told you it wouldn't hold a drink," said the attaché.

"How did you know?" asked Frau Eisenauer.

"Gentlemen—a wager!" called out the Baron. "We will wager how much the shoe holds and he who guesses most shall lose!"

"How much?" asked the Ingenieur.

"We will make it this way. Every guess must be reasonable. We will not accept one absurdly small. Who wins, shall demand from our hostess the greatest favor which a lady can grant in company" ("Hoch!—Hoch!")—"a kiss on her lips." ("Ah—h!") "And who loses, shall be condemned to drink a large tumbler-full of the last wine or liqueur used at this table. Are you agreed?"

"Agreed!—Agreed!"

"Do you, Gnädiges Fräulein, consent to recompense the fortunate winner?"

"Oh,—yes," she laughed.

"Very well. Vorwaerts! Count, you have the

shoe. Begin! I know you will do your best, for once!"

The Count gravely re-inspected the shoe yet again. At last he said:

"I'll wager that all over one hundred and forty grams will run out at the lacing. I understand that the shoe is to be placed upon the table when filled."

"Very well!—Doctor, we shall depend upon you to show us in a glass how much each bet is. Franz, get the Doctor a paper and pencil so he can write down the bets. Next!"

The wager went around the table, each making his bet and witticism. By the time the shoe came to me, some time had elapsed, and forgetful for the moment of the terms of the wager, I took a careful look at Lubitza and called out:

"About sixty-five kilograms!"

There was a moment's wondering silence, and then the laugh came; but the sorry witticism was to be my undoing, as the event proved.

"Wrong!" said the Baron. "*Two* shoes hold *that* pretty burden. You should have halved it, Herr Doktor."

"It is clear that the Herr Doktor loves liqueurs," grimly remarked the Sectionschef.

I could only be philosophical about it and say to myself that I would rather drink a tumbler of Benedictine any day than to have to kiss Lubitza on the lips, especially after my eyes had been so thoroughly opened this evening. But of course if I had not lost my head I would have tried to avoid it in some other way.

After the little shoe had gone the rounds, I carefully estimated the amount it "would hold" by filling it with rice brought from the kitchen, and then

turning this into a glass. The winner was declared to be Harry. Lubitza rose, went to him, put her arms round about his neck and kissed him on the lips with a resounding smack.

Fräulein Berg followed it with another.

"Oh," said Frau Eisenauer, "if I were only a younger woman!"

"It was the Stradivarius that has done this thing for you, Signor McClellan," said the attaché. "See how you are beholden to a son of sunny Italy!"

"And now, gentlemen, I refuse to have my shoe spoiled!" Lubitza captured her shoe after a scuffle, and slipped it on.

The butler filled the glasses, and the Count gave a very pretty and flattering toast, something about "the sweet bird who sings all our cares away," and the toast was drunk.

The fish course was brought in and for some time the conversation resolved itself into groups. During this time I constantly found myself watching Lubitza. She attracted me still less this evening since I had come to see something of her life behind the scenes and learn the sort of company she received, but she dominated my attention, as a new thing is ever apt to do. I found myself wondering what Ingenieur Overmann thought of it all. Did he still intend to marry her? I scarcely believed so, and yet—one can never tell. The woman of the stage, good or bad, has an undeniable fascination for us all,—possibly because she is always an up-to-date bundle of cleverness, and knows exactly how to manage us.

After awhile Lubitza caught me observing her and smiled. She whispered to the Ingenieur. He rose smilingly and came to my chair.

"The orders are to change posts," he said.



I condoled with him and seated myself at Lubitza's left..

Mueller now sat at my left, and I observed the rich young idler with some interest. I had heard a rumor that winnings from him had kept Ascher in extra funds for a long time past. I wondered if the tables had turned. Lubitza, however, early claimed my attention.

"Doctor Lembach was to come tonight but it is just as well that he did not. He would have made thirteen!"

"Who is Doctor Lembach?"

"An advocate—Fräulein Berg's latest adorer," she whispered.

"Why, I thought Ascher"——

"Pah!"

"Don't you like him, then?"

"Like him! Because he is here? My dear Doctor! These are the people who give an artist prestige. Voila tout!"

After she had answered a sally from Harry, she asked: "Do I seem the same to you?"

"Oh, yes, Signorina, only, of course, grown great now—and still more beautiful."

She jovially pinched my arm and turned to the Abgeordnete. The meat course was being laid and I took the opportunity to talk to Mueller a moment, but he did not seem much inclined for conversation, and my attention wandered to Lubitza once more. She was speaking with the Abgeordnete in Servian. Frau Eisenauer was relating some scandal or other and had the undivided expectant attention of all at her end of the table. The Count and Fräulein Berg had their heads together. I heard my name mentioned by the Abgeordnete and involuntarily turned. His and Lubitza's eyes were upon me.

Both laughed. The Abgeordnete said in his heavy way:

"Herr Doktor, a thousand pardons for conversing about you, but Fräulein Tomaso has but now related a most unbelievable thing. I have just accused her of having a brand new love affair—namely, with you. With what sort of an answer do you suppose she has insulted my intelligence?"

"I couldn't guess in a year! What was it?"

"Just listen! She admits that she is in love with you, but seriously asserts that you will have none of her! *Now* you can understand my deep indignation—my very rage! Am I a *young boy*, then, to be told such a thing?"

"Your anger is justified, Herr Abgeordnete! Were she a man I should offer you my services. Has she had so many love affairs, then?"

"Oh, ye Olympian Jove! The first *I* heard of was"——

I never knew what the yarn was to be for a tremendous roar of laughter at the other end of the table united the company once more.

"What is it?" called out Mueller.

"Something not fit to be repeated, of course!" said the Count.

"As hostess," called Lubitza, " and therefore your Belfehlshaberin, I order Frau Eisenauer to repeat the tale for us all!"

"Holy Saints protect us," laughed the Baron. "I dare her to!"

Nothing loth she began. I had been obliged to drink too much wine during the dinner, and not being used to it, my head was already light and the chatter seemed detached from me, but yet abnormally clear as to the mere words spoken, while at the same time I was conscious of an effort to

understand their meaning. I could only just make out that the story was about some well-known actress, her bath in ten magnums of champagne furnished by as many men, the replacing of the champagne in the bottles on the table, and the healths drunk therefrom. The nub of the story I utterly lost. Lubitza looked disgusted, but the rest were full of mirth.

"My German failed me at the pinch," I remarked to her.

"Is is just as well, Herr Doktor. I love a good story and even a scandal, but I detest actual coarseness!"

I was glad to see the last dishes come in. The ices were a relief to a tolerably parched tongue. Lubitza selected a cigarette.

"I seldom smoke. I must not risk my throat, but I am fond of one occasionally. Have you fire?"

"I'll obtain it"—and I half rose to seek a match.

There was again a roar of laughter at my expense.

"Oh yes! He'll *obtain* fire!" screamed Fräulein Berg in delight.

"Light it on Fräulein Berg! Just put it against her;—anywhere!" called the Count.

Lubitza shook her finger at the Count. He blew a kiss. She blew it on down the table.

"Faugh! Don't blow that down this way!" objected the attaché.

I could only grin fatuously. Their smiling, quizzical faces were all turned on me now. The Baron said:

"The Curaçoa is here. Now comes the time for the Herr Doktor to pay his lost wager. Where is the tumbler?"

The butler had left the room, so all except Harry, the Count and the Ingenieur tumbled out of their chairs in search of a glass.

The Ingenieur came over to me.

"Can you stand it? If not, I'll propose an easier substitute."

"No. I've lost and I won't squeal! I'll pay the bet."

Lubitza reached for the decanter, which had been two-thirds emptied, and filled it up from a carafa of water.

"That will make it better, anyhow," she remarked.

By this time the others returned with an ordinary drinking glass and placed it before me.

"Now, Herr Doktor!"

Lubitza filled it with the diluted liqueur. I stood up unsteadily.

"To the—h-handsomest woman in—Vienna!" And I drank the contents. There was a round of applause, and the Baron shook my hand. The company adjourned to the drawing room. Harry took my arm and at my request seated me near the door.

"As soon as you can slip away, Ed, get a little fresh air and come back later. If you are missed I'll take care of your apology."

Two of him were saying it. The carpets of the drawing-room were rolled up and Frau Eisenauer seated herself at a grand piano, striking up a waltz. Lubitza with Harry, and Ascher with Fräulein Berg were soon dancing. The Count and the Ingenieur made a grotesque third couple. The others were gossiping in a corner.

I stole out into the dining-room intending not so much to get air as to do as the old Romans used



to do. I got across the dining-room and from there looked back through the drawing-room door. Harry and Lubitza were high in the air dancing on nothing, sometimes head upward, sometimes head downward, each having two heads and four feet in inextricable confusion, mixed up with several Aschers, Fräulein Bergs and Ingenieurs, and the room itself was moving like a gyroscope. The floor of the dining-room softly moved up and supported my back, and I was happy and comfortable. I was dimly conscious of the butlers coming in and closing the drawing-room door. They said, "Come, Herr Doktor, I'll help you." They took me out into the hallway, and after that I do not know what passed until I found myself lying on a couch in a retired room, being served with cup after cup of black coffee and now feeling more myself, but still very drunk.

"Feeling better, Herr Doktor?" There was only one of him now.

"Yes, thank you. I think I will do soon."

"Lie still, Herr Doktor. I'll return later."

He left the room. I do not know if he came back. At last I rose, opened a window and stood in the fresh cold air awhile. This window opened upon a court. The whirling in my head began to abate and I began to feel more settled otherwise. The room I was in seemed to be a spare bed-room. It occurred to me that I might leave quietly and they would not miss me, or care, if they did. With this idea in mind I closed the window and made my way to a door. There were two in the room, and I did not remember which gave into the hallway. The one I happened to select led into a bright white room full of feminine necessaries and trifles, made evident by

a low-turned gas jet. In a moment I saw that this must be Lubitza's boudoir.

Thinking to get my general directions before I tried for the ante-room, I crossed to a window and pulled up the blind. I recognized the street corner and dropped the blind again. I would need to turn to the right when once in the hallway.

As I turned to go back I collided with the corner of a writing desk, and as I felt for the stricken place I cast an idle glance upon the desk. A letter, just begun with a half dozen lines, lay there. Instantly recognizing the script my heart went into my throat. I hastily turned up the gas and examined the letter without picking it up. It was in Italian and contained only beginning references to commonplace matters but the hand-writing chained my eye. What did it mean? This was Gisela's lovely script! Was she *here* then?

My head was still in a very unsatisfactory state though the whirling was less. The sight of the script steadied me still more but not enough to reason the matter out satisfactorily. I could not quite connect cause and effect, precedent and sequence. I did get far enough to give a superficial survey to the rest of the room trying to establish the identity of the owner, utterly without success. I knew too little of Gisela's and Lubitza's personal belongings.

Furthermore, a disquieting consciousness had come to me in this moment. I had fondly imagined that I had put Gisela forever out of my mind, and had more than once congratulated myself that I could meet her, now, without a pang, or a flutter. This moment taught me how idle and fatuous an idea that was. It had needed nothing more than this chance sight of her handwriting to cause a return in

almost full intensity of that trying moment, when on returning from Cattaro I had found the violin in its package in my rooms, nearly two years before. And here she was now, in Vienna; she ***must*** be here, of course! It was a fresh letter, only begun that evening! The ink had not yet fully blackened! She was here! And in *this* company! What had happened? Could I be still enough intoxicated to be mistaken?

I considered taking the letter and comparing it, later, with the one missive I had ever received from Gisela, but realized that it would not do. She would miss the letter, would learn from the butler that I had been in the next room, and would gather that I had been in here. It was not to be thought of.

The perplexity had the effect of still farther clearing up the fogging of my brain. My mind went back to that unlucky summer; to the ball and our quarrel; to the cathedral; and to her last words there, and finally to the very last words I had heard from her mouth.

"Falser than the very Shades themselves. I would not see your false, hypocritical face more! Go! Go to my cousin! You were ***made*** for one another, and it would be a *sin* to keep you apart!"

I straightened up and took a firm grip on my will. I turned my back on the desk, turned the gas half down again, and left the boudoir.

For one little moment before closing the door, I gazed back at the desk.

"That is her hand-writing! She is here! In Vienna, and in this company! *Now,* no more opera, no more night dinners for me! *Now* for sticking to my work;—where I'll never meet her!"

I successfully sought the ante-room without meet-



ing a soul. I could hear the ring of riotous laughter from the drawing-room. They were still going it in there. I looked at my watch—it was a quarter past four. My overcoat was soon on, and in a couple of minutes I was at the house-door ringing for the haus-meister to let me out, and my bed saw me very soon afterwards.

CHAPTER IV

It was many months before I saw Lubitza or any of her guests again although she and I exchanged messages, once or twice, through Harry. The latter and I spent that summer in Germany, and then I parted with him, as he was booked for a concert tour in the north, and we could be together no longer. I could only look forward to the February following when he had dates for two appearances in Vienna. As for myself, I was attending very faithfully to my work as I was intending to make this year my last in Austria, and later complete my preparation in the broader field at Berlin. As the busy months flew by, the veil became once more drawn over my memory of Gisela, and I meant that it should remain so this time.

One night, late in December, the chief of our surgical staff requested me to take personal charge of a critical case out in Cottage, and I made my way out there at once. For conscientious reasons I took the night watch in person, arranging to sleep at the house in the morning,—with a view of insuring proper attention during the night hours when one having less responsibility might have risked a nap or two.

Christmas eve found our patient but little improved, so that evening found me at the bedside. About half past eleven our patient was sleeping, so I left her in charge of the two nurses and went into a front room which had been allotted to me.

The night was bitterly cold, and the room poorly heated, so I donned my overcoat and hat, pulled

the blümo and covers from the bed, nested these about my feet and knees and sat down to try to read.

Here in this suburb all was very still and I heard few sounds save the crunching of snow under the feet of some belated home seeker and an occasional voice. None of these casual sounds attracted my notice until some time past one when I suddenly found myself sitting up straight, intently listening to two approaching voices.

Once again I experienced that trying sensation as of a leaden lump of something or another trying to come out by my throat. If that were not Gisela's voice, it was strangely like it!

I rose hastily, turned the light very low, went to the window and opened it. A very narrow space of lawn lay between me and the street and I was in the second floor of the villa, but the distance was short and a street lamp spread a circle of light over the snow hardly a dozen yards away and a window of our own ground floor was alight. The couple came along muffled up in wraps and conversing earnestly. They were two women. One was certainly too large to be Gisela and my eyes fastened upon the other one. They stopped a little on my side of the street lamp and I could hear pretty well most they said.

"So he won't pay for your rooms after the first?" questioned the large woman.

"Yes, he would, I think, but I will no longer take the money—from him."

"Don't you know anybody else you can go to?"

"Not one."

As she answered the smaller woman raised her head. It was muffled up about the sides and chin



but her eyes were revealed by the light from our own window.

It was Gisela. Not a doubt of it! There could be no second such pair of eyes in the world. Whoever has tried to identify a person merely by the eyes has found that these must be very much individualized if he succeed; but I was in no doubt here.

Of course I was not surprised to come across her in Vienna at last, for the letter on the desk in Lubitza's apartments had enabled me to conclude her presence here. I had only wondered, at times, at the fact that the encounter had been so long delayed. Nor did the seeming revelation of this conversation surprise me greatly. In Lubitza's milieu, what more natural then that she should have a man "friend!" In that milieu, beautiful girl that she was, and in Vienna, without proper protectors and without an admonitive education in matters of the world, it was her natural fate,—along with thousands of other ones of like destiny in the city. But what was she doing away out here in the Währinger Cottage? I had supposed that she was living with Lubitza, and on various grounds had elected not to be present at the dinner that night. Of course her residence in the suburb explained the chance that I had not met with her before.

And why was she in need of money? Had she finally lost her estate then? I knew she must be, now, not far from the day of her legal majority but I did not remember to have heard the date mentioned and could not guess whether the day had passed or not. And what did this late hour mean? Probably the opera.

These thoughts flew through my mind as one, and kept in the background for the moment that

wearying gray sadness which I knew would ensue after she would go out of my sight.

There were some further words which I did not catch. Then the larger woman put her arm around Gisela's shoulder.

"Never mind, Gizachen! You can come and live with me until I go back to Moscow. Perhaps better luck will come to you by then."

"Oh, Cecilie, you cannot afford it!"

"Nonsense. I'll sell my rings and we'll have enough for two."

"I'll not allow it, Cecilie!"

"Bah! Of what use are they to me? I was going to, anyway. Come, Gisa, dear, let us get home."

The two walked on, up the street, affectionately, arm in arm. I could not watch them far, as a high snow laden hedge intervened, moreover, I was shivering with the cold. I closed the window.

Should I follow them and see where they lived? Of what use!

But the temptation assailed me with insistency—with a singular insistency which I could explain in no way. It was as though some ghostly hand had seized upon my very will and was dragging upon it with paralyzing effect upon reason, judgment and even my very wishes. In this moment I realized that I still loved her, as deeply, truly and unchangeably as I ever had, and even more; but it seemed to me that it was not that alone which was beating down my will just now; I was hazily conscious of a more powerful influence still than my love for her; one which I could in no wise define and which finally compelled me to give way.

I glanced cautiously into the sick room and saw that my patient was still asleep and that the nurses were at their posts. I beckoned one and informed



her that I was going out a few moments, and then went downstairs and out of doors.

The two figures were far up the street. I saw them turn off to the right. I could not go far from the house but I risked a rapid run to the corner. When I reached it they had disappeared—probably around another corner, and I did not dare pursue them further.

For the rest of that night I walked the floor trying to think out my way, ay, my very duty. Only with the dawn did I settle the hard debate. I had tried to banish her from my life. She had come back into it again, and this fact was not to be set aside by a mere act of will, and my will seemed powerless to try. What was this hidden thing that was driving me so irresistibly? Was it because I had seen her eyes? No, for it was very significant that I had listened to her voice long before I could have recognized it, under ordinary circumstances.

Well, she was here, in the same city, without a friend save her companion that evening, in trouble, and in want. Kismet!

CHAPTER V

As I had night duty and must use the mornings for needed sleep, and besides as some part of the afternoons was taken up with work at the hospital, I did not have much time for outside matters. However as the nature of the task excluded much personal endeavor there proved to be enough spare hours for it. For I still resolved not to have any painful meeting with Gisela in person if possible, and would act anonymously.

My first step was to dispatch a letter to the banker, Signor Sbutega, in order to get as much as possible in touch with her affairs from that end, and in the course of a week I had his answer.

It was a surprise. He informed me that the Signorina Gisela was not in Cattaro. She had left there *two months* before, presumably not to return, as they had learned that she had taken all her belongings with her in several large trunks. He was sorry he could give me no further news, as owing to strained relations he could not approach her uncle or Paulo with any confidential inquiry, nor was there any intermediate person whom he could employ. That part of the family which had remained in Cattaro had lived continuously in great seclusion, and all save two or three very close friends had been compelled to cease calling there. No one in Cattaro saw any of them often. He presumed I would know that Lubitza had left home more than two years before, as she was now a noted woman and was at present in my own city. With many kind expressions and begging me to command him in any way

he could be of service, he signed his letter and appended a very cordial personal postscript in his own hand.

Two months before! Now, of course, the banker's information was quite inaccurate in this particular. I knew that Gisela had come to Vienna nearly *eight* months before—unless, indeed, she had made a visit before finally moving here. I wrote the banker a second letter with many apologies and several definite inquiries.

In his answer he insisted that Gisela had been continuously in Cattaro up to two months before his previous writing. He knew this positively through his daughter who had always been on friendly terms with Gisela and who had seen her there at regular intervals up to two months before the date of his former letter. The Signorina had made no visit to Vienna previous to her final leaving for there at the time of which he spoke. No, she was not yet of legal age. He could not give me the precise date but was certain that the day had not yet passed, though it could not now be far away. No, she had not left with a companion—not Cattaro, at least. He had taken pains to ascertain that from the captain of the boat by which she had left. Teresa was still with the family—his wife had seen her within the current week. Paulo was in Mula and was employed in the office of a newly built factory there. He had seen Paulo recently, though not to speak with him. Begging my further commands he again subscribed himself with many kind expressions.

By the time this second letter came I was no longer under the necessity of spending my nights in Cottage. The letter was delivered at my rooms early one Sunday morning and I found it waiting

on my desk after I had dressed and was about to take breakfast.

Of course there was no longer any doubt that Signor Sbutega had informed me correctly. I must assume, then, that Gisela had left Cattaro only two months, or ten weeks, before. Whose, then, had been that letter on Lubitza's desk? I debated this for a good half hour oblivious of a cooling breakfast, and at last accepted the most reasonable conclusion that occurred to me. I had been very drunk that evening. True, I had partially recovered by the time I had seen the letter, but I still had had a swimming head. I concluded that in the half light of a temporarily obscured intelligence, I had either been the victim of suggestion, or had seen something that had not existed. And thus the question was shelved.

And so Gisela had not been with Lubitza and her companions. But who had been paying her way? I wondered if Lubitza knew she was here.

My next step was to visit the Austrian attorney of the American Consulate in Vienna and ascertain Gisela's precise legal status as nearly as would be allowed by the facts in my possession.

He could not be positive in his answer, as to prejudge the validity of a will required an inspection of the instrument itself and full knowledge of the collateral circumstances. However, he believed that in general a testator did have the right to require adhesion on the part of the legatee to the tenets and injunctions of a Church as a condition precedent to inheriting—especially in the case of a minor. This would be especially true as regards immoral behavior or living. The conditions surrounding a particular case might make a difference. No, he said, the Court would not hold the mere en-



trance to the inner sanctuary of a Greek church as a breaking of the terms of the will. He did not conceive that such a rule of the Church came under the meaning of the will—it would not have been looked upon as a "cardinal" rule. If we did not keep the word "cardinal" in mind, the mere fact that the legatee had affiliated with some other church than that of the testator might be regarded as disqualifying her, whether she were responsible for the change or not. Besides, in questions of mere doctrine regulations or procedure, the church of which the testator had been a member would govern; not the one which had been adopted by the legatee. But the rules for moral and dignified living were the same in all Christian creeds and he believed that any court would hold that this was what was referred to by the clause in the will.

Yes, possibly if I could prove contributory and purposeful neglect and establish a connection between this and her downfall, he believed the court would uphold her on all points. But (he warned me), purposeful, contributory and *apposite* neglect would all have to be proven, beyond a reasonable doubt. Such a suit was always bitter, and very uncertain in its result.

Yes, he was quite sure, under this hypothetical case, that if the legatee were to marry legally before her majority she would be reinstated in her rights as a legatee. In interpreting such an instrument the Court always lent an ear to the evident intention of the testator rather than to technicalities. In this case the intention was the legatee should be occupying a respectable position in life at the time of her majority. That was the essence of the whole clause, he considered, and he believed this interpretation would stand.

No, it would not matter whether she married the person with whom she had misconducted herself or some other one. In my hypothetical case the will did not dictate that. Such a construction would, therefore, constitute a very material addition to the will and the Court would scarcely venture its admission. He was satisfied that a mere marriage—any marriage with any proper person, before her majority, would operate to restore her rights.

Yes, the marriage of a minor without the consent of parents or guardians, is voidable by such parents or guardians, at their option. No, such a marriage remains legal if no steps are taken by the guardian to annul it, and the absence of such a step up to the day of majority ratifies the marriage by all parties. No, a secret marriage is for many reasons inadvisable—even scarcely possible, in this instance. It is better to wait until one or two days before the day of majority, and then have the ceremoney openly performed in some country where the parties are already of mature age and where fewer time-eating formalities are required to advance. In such an event the guardians would not know of it in time to take steps to annul it.

Such was his opinion. So I carried away two crumbs from the interview. She could at the worst fight for her heritage, and she could surely reinstate herself by a marriage at the last moment. With whom? Her time must be short for that, now. With whom? It need only be a marriage of expediency. Should I offer her this? I could leave her directly after the ceremony without changing a single item of her life. Should I? *Could* I do it! What was my duty? At one time I had been in a position to protect her, but utterly without reason she had bade me begone, most imperatively, in



terms that left no room for debate. Under such circumstances to have continued to protect her at such grave expense to the banker had seemed unjustifiable, and my conscience was still clear on that point. But now I was placed again in a position to shield her (if she would be shielded), and this time at the expense of my own peace only, without involving my friends. How I wished for good old Harry with his better wit and larger experience!

I decided, at last, that it was necessary to have an interview with her and show her her position. Duty demanded that, at least. Also, this course simplified another feature. In seeing her I would no doubt meet her woman friend and could arrange with her, privately, for the temporary support of both, without Gisela ever finding it out. But I would see the woman friend first, if I could.

However, there was one more step to take before seeking her out. That was to ascertain, if possible, who had been paying for her apartments and support, and the circumstances under which that had occurred. Since learning that she had not been in the companionship of her cousin and of that coterie I sought a little more to give her the benefit of a doubt. I had not liked the conversation I had overheard Christmas Eve, and still did not like it—from any standpoint. In Vienna, men who are willing to support a woman out of mere kindness and without a quid pro quo are very rare birds! Enough girls must give up their honor even to retain a situation. Still it was barely possible that she yet remained an innocent girl. Was I not just now planning to support her, without her knowledge, and meaning that she should never learn of the fact? Was I the only man in the world who would help a woman honorably? Perhaps she had met another such;

another who perhaps loved her as I did. And if his motives were not good, he might still have helped her without having received a return.

Of course it was possible, but still I did not like the situation. I had especially not liked the ready question from her companion asking if she had no one else to go to. The question seemed to contain an assumption—and they evidently were close personal friends.

On leaving the attorney's offices I had directed the cabman to drive to the principal police station. In Vienna an exact record is kept by the police of the comings and goings of each and every person, great or small, resident or transient. However, in this instance my inquiry there was fruitless. No Gisela Tomanovich and no Gisela Portulan were known there. I could only conclude that she was living here under a false name. This I liked still less.

My duties did not permit a haunting of the locality away out in Cottage where I had seen her and my gorge rose at the idea of putting a watcher on her track. Did Lubitza know she was in Vienna? I considered it very probable, but could I get any information out of Lubitza? I resolved to try. Perhaps I might get light in various directions.

It had been so long since I had had even an indirect word from Lubitza that I supposed she had despaired of me as not being worth her trouble; so I did not risk a note, but instead scanned the operatic program for the week and found that she would sing in "Manon." Accordingly I bought a ticket in the fourth row from the orchestra, in the hope of having a recognition from her during a recall, in which case I would send in my note after the close of the opera. If she did not recognize me I would visit her anyhow.



But Lubitza had one great quality which doubtless had contributed no little to the immediate success of her short but meteoric operatic career. This was her unfailing self-control and seemingly interminable good temper under all circumstances. It did not matter what boiling might be occurring within, Lubitza not only would not give way to temper but also could look as though not even self-control were being exercised. She was well-known for the quality, and my own small acquaintance with her had borne out the oft-quoted fact.

Now I had been Lubitza's guest at a dinner—had received especial consideration as a guest at her hands on that occasion; had stolen away without the courtesy of an adieu—had never made a return call, the latter a matter for constant reproach on Harry's part until we actually parted. Nor had I for months past sent her any message or given any sign that I was aware of her continued existence. But, true to herself, during not one but two recalls, I received the compliment of a personal smile that was all any man could have expected under the circumstances, and in answer to my note, an usher brought to me in the garderobe a reply which made me feel ashamed and small to a degree that no amount of reproaches could have brought about. She "would be free Saturday evening and hoped I would give her as many hours as I could" was among other generous sentences, and on the Saturday evening, at the hour set, I repaired thither.

Lubitza did not keep me waiting after I was shown into her drawing-room. I heard her say to the butler:

"At home to no one; remember, *no one,* Franz!"

She came up with a smile, put her arms around my neck, and kissed me on the lips.

"*Now*, then, Herr Doktor! Are you not impressed by my forgiving nature?"

"Ah, Signorina, what better proof is there? Little do I deserve it, I admit. But I have not absented myself because I have forgotten 'the Tomaso.' No one forgets her,—or ever will!"

She pushed two chairs nearly together and we seated ourselves.

"I am not so sure about that. When I was looking at the operatic stage from afar I dreamed of being the pivot about which should revolve the lives of all who should once hear me sing. During my self-centered life as a vocal student this idea was much fostered, for we hear only music and of music, and know only musicians. We get to believing that we are the world; that we are looked upon by all others as the world, and that all other pursuits in life are but our various back scenes. But now that I have climbed up to the very top, my eyesight has remained good enough to see the other peaks, on a clear day, and I have realized that this one upon which I stand is but one of many, and moreover that it is not the tall mountain it once looked to be. It is only one of those pretty grass grown little hills which are sought by the pleasure seeker on a Sunday afternoon."

"Well, Signorina, at least it is of use to more people and more loved, than the forbidding Matterhorns which most never even see. And, by the way, your words remind me that I have never had a chance to ask you about your student years. It is reported that you studied awhile here in Vienna. Did you?"

She proceeded to tell me of her study time; of her hopes and trials, disappointments and successes, and many a piquant anecdote and experience with



different people of prominence in the Continental musical world. Her account found, in me, a ready and hungry listener, for once upon a time, ages before, I, too, had had dreams of the concert stage—of trials and successes, and of a final flight through the musical world; of being a second Paganini or Wieniawski, or Thompson or Ysäye, or, at least of leaving the world an accepted member of that resplendent galaxy.

It appeared from her account that most of her study had been done in Italy and Paris, some in Berlin. She had been in Vienna only two months at an early stage of her work.

"I saw you once," she remarked smiling.

"Really? Where was it?"

"It was at the corner of the Kärntner and Singer Streets. You were having a great row with a cabman. I wanted to go up and speak to you but you were in such a fury that I did not dare," and she laughed heartily.

"I don't remember the circumstance. Did I leave enough of him to bury?"

"Oh, yes. There was much—much of him. You called him a 'schuft'."

"Oh, I remember now. That fellow had me up for using the term. By the way, Signorina, why was I not informed of your presence.

"I really did not—quite—dare," she answered, gravely. "You see it was just after—also, why are we so formal with one another? I am not 'Signorina'—to you—nor 'the Tomaso.' I am Lubitza," and she passed her arm confidingly through mine.

"And *my* name is Edward, my lady."

"Good. Of course I know I ought to call you 'Herr Doktor' and I shall try not to forget to give

you your hard-earned title when others are by; but it is difficult to call you so. It is so—so—unromantic, so—impossible!—between young people. It so—brings up the mental picture of years, pomposity, long verbiage, nose-glasses,—and bottles and jars containing all sorts of abominations—and knives, and dissecting—and microbes and disgusting ailments—Faugh! How *can* a girl have a romance with a man and call him 'Doctor?"

"Alas—you are right!" I answered as soon as I could. "Hereafter I shall know that no love is true that is protested by the mouth that utters 'Doctor'!"

"Soft-ly,—that does not *quite* follow. But when she says 'Doctor, I love you,' set her down as either an artful and designing female, or an insensate block of wood."

"We mere men can always learn from the fair sex when we have the good sense to listen and not do all of the talking."

"The best lesson you can learn from us is to be good observers. We women seldom fail in that. Do you remember what I once said to you?"

"Not this moment. What was it?"

She was smiling archly and prettily in my very face, her eyes traveling back and forth from my one eye to the other.

"I told you," and she held up a finger,—"I—told—you"—now a half suppressed laugh—"that—you didn't know—when—good luck was hovering over your head!"

Then she jumped up and pirouetted gaily about the room, looking back teasingly over her shoulder. Of course, now, I should have been in hot pursuit of her—but I remembered my errand, and sat still, though not a little tempted.

She stood a little way off, still smiling quizzically,

then she seated herself upon the corner of a table, still smiling—seeming to study me for a minute, a little wonderingly, as it seemed, the while clutching a bouquet I had brought. She made a fascinating picture of the woman as she sat there. Lubitza had a piquant face and beautiful figure, and I myself wondered why she could not touch me more deeply. She again rose, and turned about to face me and her dress clung in folds about her. Her face grew grave. The poise of her head was grace itself, and her decolleté costume allowed full view of a lovely neck. Her arms and pretty little feet had always been the theme of rhapsody, in the city. After gravely observing me quite a full minute, she asked in a low voice:

"Do you still love her, Edward?"

The question was direct and I answered it as honestly as I knew.

"I don't know, Lubitza."

Her half-Oriental eyes continued to gaze speculatively into my face. Then she came around behind me, put her arms around my neck and her face against mine.

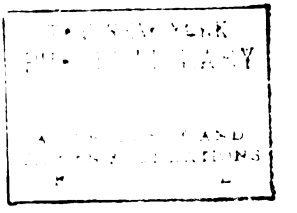
"Edward, my cousin never loved you, dear. Do you not understand that? Hers is not a nature for love—at least not for that love which gives unselfishly. She has inherited too much of the blood of her great-grandmother, and of the accursed Roccos, for she is in the direct line. It is fortunate for you, dear, that she did not love you. Your life together would have been one long war, for my cousin is happy only when she has a quarrel on, or something to weep about. Remember, we grew up together from childhood and I know her, through and through. Edward, my cousin never had a lover until *you* came. Why? She is a beautiful



"Then she seated herself upon the corner of a tabl still smiling."

(*Accursed Roccos.*)

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girl, and the heiress. Why? Because all the other men at home who knew the family knew her disposition. You, of course, did not. If you had won her, you would have regretted it! *I know!* You are not a man to live with that kind of a woman. Be glad it did not happen! *I know!* Do you believe me, dear?"

"Where is your cousin now? At home?"

There was a barely perceptible hesitation before she replied—only a very little—but enough to show that the answer was not quite spontaneous. I realized too late that my question had been unskillfully worded—in the highest degree, for an acute woman like Lubitza must reason at once from it that I must have some reason for the half suggestion that Gisela might not be in her natural place—her home. But I could not recall the words.

"She was until three months ago."

"And where is she now?"

There was no longer hesitation.

"We do not know."

"Not know!" And I grasped her hands, unlocked her arms from my neck, and turned half round in the chair to face her.

"You do not know! Not any of you?"

"No, Edward—at least none of the family knows."

I stood up and faced her.

"How did she come to leave her uncle's house?"

"Of course, as you must know, Edward, I was not there when she left. I was here in Vienna filling my rôles. She left only three months ago. I can only tell you what my father and Paulo have written to me. You are perfectly welcome to read both of their letters, Edward, and you will see that I am telling merely the truth. I think that truth



will surprise you, but not as much as it surprised me. The whole thing, in a nutshell, is that Ober Leutnant Carl Overmann has been trying to sit upon two stools at once!"

"The Ingenieur!"

"Ay, the Ingenieur," she answered, impassively. "I will speak openly to you, dear. As you know, he and I have long been engaged to be married. We have not specially loved one another, but he is a handsome man and a good partie, and as things go in life, I could have been fairly contented with him, I think. On his side he reckoned that I would have wealth, and later, since my operatic successes he seemed, or professed to be, consumed with pride at the idea of sooner or later, becoming my husband. We have always joked about the engagement, and both have always flirted;—he, because he wished to, and I have always returned the dose. Let us be seated, Edward. Why stand here like two fancy hitching posts?"

I placed a chair for her and resumed one that would allow me to watch her face. She continued:

"Well, about four months ago, some time in September, I received a letter from Paulo informing me that he had seen Overmann in conversation with my cousin late one evening in the south end of Stolivo. He wrote that the Ingenieur had not been at the house, nor advised any one of his presence. Nor did my cousin speak of this meeting later. Paulo wrote that he had said nothing to father as yet, because he wanted first to know what I thought about it, and what I wished done.

Well, the operatic season was just about to open and I was scarcely in a position even to think about the affair, to say nothing of taking any part in it,

so I wrote to Paulo to tell father at once and to tell father to do whatever he thought best. Some time later I had a letter from father about the matter but not containing any additional fact.

I heard nothing more for nearly two months and then I received a letter from father in which he wrote that my cousin had left Cattaro with all her belongings. Father wrote what had happened, and after Paulo's letter, I was no longer surprised.

For some time father, Paulo and one trusted servant had kept watch without any success. I forgot to tell you, Edward, that my father had received a letter from Trebinje, supposedly written just during the period when Paulo had seen the Ingenieur in Stolivo—a letter prepared in advance, of course—and thus, his intention to keep his visit a secret was left in no doubt.—Well, I was going to say, the family watched in vain until one day Paulo saw my cousin slyly slip a note into Teresa's hands. Teresa was my cousin's former nurse, and had remained on in the family.

Paulo followed her out onto the road, took the note from her by force, and brought both her and the note back into the house. The note was a consent to a request to meet Overmann that evening.

My cousin had not seen this occurrence, and they locked Teresa in a room, and sent the note to him by another and faithful servant, with an excuse for the change of messengers, and that evening they waited for my cousin to go out. Paulo and my father followed her, watched her meet the Ingenieur and talk with him a long time, and then secretly return to her room. As soon as she entered, my father and Paulo followed her into her room and faced her with the affair.

My cousin has an impudence beyond limit and



defied my father, denying that her goings and comings were any of his business. Of course I do not know all that passed but Gisela has a furious temper and it is not strange that my father finally became angered past all endurance and ordered her to choose between giving up the intrigue and leaving his roof. She grandly replied that she would leave at once. She packed most of her things that night, the rest the day following and the second day after, left Cattaro. She left there between two and three months ago. Now, Edward, you have the whole story as far as I know about it."

"And Teresa—did she not follow her mistress?"

"No, she remained at home. I suppose taking her did not suit my cousin's sweet plans."

"And the Ingenieur?"

"He came to see me once, the second week in October. Since then I have not seen him."

"That would be just at the time he was also visiting your cousin."

"Yes, Edward. I never mentioned the subject to him, but, of course, he now knows that I know all."

I mused over this information a long time. That she had recited a truthful narrative seemed beyond question. We cannot always know when a narrative is false, but we generally recognize truth. Of course, as far as it went, the account did not implicate Gisela beyond a doubt, but the inference left little in question. It was just what the Ingenieur might be expected to do—and he had played a good game. He had toyed with Lubitza for years, meanwhile waiting until Gisela would be near her majority when less control could be exercised by her guardian, keeping himself prepared for a spring either way. I congratulated myself that I had been wise enough to ascertain Gisela's circumstances be-

fore making a fool of myself by going to her. But why would Gisela no longer accept the Ingenieur's support? Probably a temporary quarrel such as we had had.

Lubitza had told her story curiously without spleen or anger, as if she were relating the experience of a third person, although the new affair meant much to her. Things had worked out very well for the Ingenieur, and I inwardly cursed old Tomanovich for his stupidity in allowing Gisela to go, for now the Ingenieur held everything in his hands. He could marry either girl and take the estates with her, and it had become, with him, merely a matter of choice of the woman herself now—a choice probably long considered. He probably *had* preferred Gisela. Now he could confront Gisela with the choice of marrying him or being exposed as having broken the real terms of the will. If the day of her majority passed without a marriage or if she refused him, he could give Lubitza the choice of marrying him or having the proof of Gisela's wrong-doing withheld. Now, for the present, his position with Lubitza was safe and he could desert her in order to devote himself to Gisela and keep other possible suitors away, for in the latter case lay the one danger to the success of his plans.

There was but one consideration I could not explain. I asked Lubitza the question.

"Since the Ingenieur and your cousin are in love, why do they not simply marry? Why do they wait?"

But in an instant after asking I remembered why. Of course he, no more than I, could secure the guardian's consent. Lubitza answered:

"I suppose he is trying to choose between my more beautiful cousin and my more brilliant self."

I did not believe that was the explanation, either.

"Perhaps he is trying to choose between your more innocent cousin and"——

I had thought aloud. I had not really meant to say it.

"And my more worldly self," she finished. "Possibly."

Should I tell her that Gisela and the Ingenieur had quarreled? Or, at any rate, disagreed? No! I would take no part in it!

"Lubitza, I am of the opinion that the Ingenieur will come back to you. Will you marry him in that case?"

"I'd have to, dear. And—yes, I would marry him. I am sure you know about the family estates?"

"Certainly. But are you not independent now? Will you not soon have more than you can use with still more to follow? Why do you care? Why not let her have her estate? In a few years, if you are careful, you will have as much."

"I will not give up either the estates or my affianced husband, if I can help it, Edward."

Alas, here it was again. She had not said it violently as poor Gisela had, but there was even less room for doubt that she meant it.

Lubitza had completely won me over. Her ability to discuss such a state of affairs with such self-control engaged my respect, as it must have done that of any other person. Furthermore she had gained my sympathy.

Of course Gisela had an undoubted right to fight for her estate. She also had a right to fall in love. So far as purely worldly equities went, she even had the right to take a lover without marriage. But she had not had a right to employ her unusual

personal and material advantages in robbing her cousin of her fiancé. Lubitza might be what she pleased; that she, in her private life, was no example for the youth, I was very certain. Nor would she ever be. She no more than a spring breeze would ever be 'prisoned by marriage. But all that was by the side of the question, and did not alter the fact that she had received dishonorable treatment at the hands of both the Ingenieur and her cousin.

My errand with Lubitza was accomplished but I stayed on. I wished I could offer her my sympathy, but hesitated to discuss the matter for fear I should let slip the fact that I knew Gisela was in Vienna, or make some other slip that would do nobody any good. But I did wish to say *something* kind to her for I did not believe Lubitza was inwardly as calm about the affair as her outward mien indicated. I suppose she read my thoughts in the workings of my face, for she rose and said:

"Oh, dear friend, never mind. What must be, will be. You are the only one with whom I have ever talked this over, and I did not intend to entertain you with my troubles tonight."

She placed a hand on either side of my head and made me look up at her.

"Edward, be my friend! Not to help me in my affairs, for there is no way. Nor do I want sympathy. I only want a little sunshine that is real and that does not come through the smoked glasses of selfishness and self-interest. Just be my good friend to whom I can look for a little that is real amidst all the falseness I have about me. I always liked you, dear—but that is no matter. I know I am no longer the woman for you to marry, so never have a moment's fear of any misunderstanding on my

part. But we can be much to each other—if you will, Edward."

Now Lubitza was a very handsome woman, to say the least, and I do not think I have ever yet met the man who could have resisted that appeal, under the circumstances, and as I believe, few of them would have tried. And she asked so little! What I know is, that the inevitable happened and a moment later Lubitza was comfortably installed on my knee, amid merry laughter on the part of both. Harry's twice repeated recommendation came back to me—"Let old bones remain buried," Lubitza herself had not needed this advice. Should I be less wise? And why not? I would be robbing nobody and neither would she. We were both in the same position; she deserted by her fiancé and I forgotten by my loved one. There was no one to say us yea or nay. Since she asked it, why not indeed!

"What a head of hair you have, dear! It goes through my fingers like silk threads blown about in the wind. Overmann has hair like the bristles of a shoe-brush and none too much of it. By the way, Edward, did he ever give you his prescription for the cure of love?"

"No. He has given Harry and me some elementary instruction on the subject, but he forgot to tell us that. What is it?"

"If you have loved but lightly
Then change of scene and thought
To lands where the sun shines brightly—
Thus comes your rest. Why not?
But if your heart, my lover,
Strikes deep, the vicious shot,
Then, pause not—leave your cover!

And let your pace be hot!
For what? Why, just another
From the same Dan Cupid's Lot!"

"Ah. As a remedy, it seems to be based upon the idea that we become hardened to the onslaught —if we survive. I have known of other remedies that seemed to have a like ground. There is also a botanical prescription for this ailment."

"Oh, that will be nauseating, I am sure! But what is it?

"Take ye
Of Violets,
Of Roses,
Of Lilies, each 1 bloom.
Of sensitive plant, 1 piece.
Of Daisies, quod sufficit.
Mix, and steep in good wine, but do not allow the mixture to come to a boil.
Signa: Warm before using. Apply as needed."

"But, Edward, who wishes to be cured of love? Has anyone ever called you for this illness?"

"Not just exactly. As you suggest, they do not seek a cure, usually,—until the ailment has progressed much. Lubitza."

"Well, dear?"

"Do you not love Overmann?"

"In a way, yes dear. A woman must always have a certain regard for a handsome, manly and able man, who is or has been, her fiancé. Overmann is rising in his work. Next year he will be promoted over some of his seniors. Then, dear, he and I have never actually quarreled—that makes a difference. But he does not satisfy me and, in

ways, has never attracted me. Perhaps I have more pride in, than love for, him. But, dear, let us not talk of him more! Let us forget him, for now, at least. Have we not, both, something to forget? Let us help one another to do it."

Both of her arms went around my neck and her face against mine. Lubitza was one of those rare persons gifted by Nature with the sweet natural perfume which takes up its abode with some sound and healthy people whose diet is simple and who are very faithful to the bath. This perfume intoxicated me like a glass of strong wine. I raised her in my arms, arose and waltzed about the room. She laughed gleefully and began to whistle an air. But she was no feather-weight girl and the dance could not last and we fell full length upon a chaise-longue, I out of breath and she laughing with delight. Her face was a glory of color and her Oriental eyes were half-closed.

"Oh, Edward! That was delicious. How *strong* you are! I don't believe I know another man who could do that! You cannot guess how lovely a sensation it is to be picked up like that and carried around as if one were a doll. It brings home to a woman a man's strength, and that appeals to every one of us. Oh, Edward! why have we waited all these months? It is so much taken out of our lives!"

"Lubitza, do you"——

"Don't call me by that name any more, dear! I hear that from every ordinary friend—therefore it is not for you. Call me Cara. It is my little childhood name. It will be sweet from you."

"Cara!"

I pushed her away from me and at the same instant fell sprawling over the edge of the couch onto

the floor, where I half sat, supported on my hands, and stared at her.

"Cara!"

She sat up and at first gazed at me in astonishment. Then she blushed violently. Then I saw her face change as it does when a person, faced by a bad situation, determines to meet it bravely.

"Why—yes, Edward. Do you not remember my letter and your answer? That summer in Cattaro? You answered with the name and said you had partly got used to it."

And she smiled hesitatingly.

It—the one word—had been like a dash of ice cold water. The details of the matter crept, one by one, back into my mind, and I saw the full light, at last; and I saw it too late! A purposeless impotent rage began to boil deep down, and the froth rose up and filled my throat, head and brain. I struggled to my feet only to fall into a chair and stare at her again. It must have been two or three minutes before I began to recover a semblance of control, and during this time she gazed at me in wide-eyed and open-mouthed amazement.

At last I found my tongue, but speech was difficult.

"Lubitza—do you mean—for one instant—that *you*—wrote that letter?"

"Of course I wrote it! Why not?"

Self-government only came to me by constantly keeping in mind that she was a woman, but the unruly tongue refused to act, again, for a moment. In sheer inability to do anything else, I conned the letter over;—for I knew it word for word.

"What—did you—mean by the 'little arrangement' you spoke of?"

"Our meeting in Vienna, of course! What did



you mean in your reply when you referred to it? Ah—h—h! I think I begin to see! You thought my cousin had written it, did you, Herr Doktor? And you had some 'arrangement' or other with her! *Evidently* matters had progressed farther between you and my cousin than any of us were dreaming!"

So Father Petrus had kept faith then—even after Paulo's release! I wondered why. He must have begun his account to the Signor with the beginning of our own conversation. Or was it merely that Lubitza was an exquisite liar? I remembered Paulo.

"Lubitza, do you mean to tell me that you did not know that I was deeply in love with Gisela?"

"How could I judge how much you loved her! Of course I know you asked father for her the night of the ball, but you never saw her afterwards —or did you? It seems we did not quite do justice to my cousin's management in these things!"

"And so, you did not know that I truly loved your cousin?" I asked again, very sarcastically.

"Then? No! I only knew that you admired and wished to marry her. She was the heiress! We were not used to the idea of anybody *loving* her! That very afternoon when you called you had said that you and your friend were to leave in a day or two,—as I supposed, without having seen her since the ball. My father had refused to give her to you. Therefore I naturally supposed you had given her up, and were willing to try it on with me, and I was willing. What was your 'little arrangement' with my cousin? And where and how did you meet her after the ball?"

Had Father Petrus never spoken then? After Paulo was released and his silence was no longer necessary? Had her father never told her of the

search in the church? I could not believe it. I conned over the letter I had written her. It simply could not be that she had honestly believed it was for her. No, Lubitza had in the previous moment, either momentarily forgotten the incident or she had not known that I would know what effect the letter had had. Again I remembered her brother's histrionic power—and her own,—and with the memory knew her for the exquisite liar she was.

"Lubitza, did your cousin ever see my reply to your letter?"

She laughed derisively.

"Oh, yes—the following morning. That woman Teresa used to take care of both our rooms, and was always meddling with my things. She opened a drawer, found the letter, and showed it to my cousin. My cousin kept it, refusing to return it in spite of an ugly quarrel and father's order to do so. Otherwise I would return it to you now—since it was not meant for me."

"Lubitza, you knew very well that that letter was never meant for you, and you left it lying about so your cousin would find it!"

"And why, pray? I was not aware of the fact that you were toying with both of us à l'Ingenieur Overmann. As I have said, I naturally supposed you had given her up. I believe you said, this evening, that Overmann had given you some elementary instruction in love. You seem to assimilate instruction well. If you will assure me that you have listened to your medical lectures as carefully, I shall not forget to call you when I need a physician's help!"

Lubitza spoke in a seemingly calm and perfectly even tone of voice. I understood, now, what poor high-strung Gisela had always had to contend



with—I was getting just a taste of it myself. Here was a woman who could quarrel bitterly without getting into a passion, without raising her voice or changing her expression. She could cut, watching the while for the next chance to cut, and, above all, she had that talent which some women possess to the highest degree and which is more seldom found in men, of juggling with circumstances and occurrences,—bending one a little, snipping another a bit, moving them up and down and from side to side, like a child putting together his lettered building blocks, until he has constructed something that the origin of the material had never dreamed of—and in Lubitza's case with the facility of long practice.

My astonishment at her saved some of my own self-control for it gave time for my first fury to subside. How she had befooled and befogged me to-night! I took out my handkerchief and scrubbed my lips until they stung. She laughed, derisively.

"Is the aftertaste so bad, then, Herr Doktor? Well, it will help you to remember, hereafter, that our lips have met."

Futhermore, I began to see the light in another direction, as I watched her calm and now quizzical face. This story of the Ingenieur having deserted her—I had believed it, and still believed the facts on the face of it. But as she had juggled the facts which had occurred at Cattaro, so now I believed she had juggled with those of her story this evening. Yes, the Ingenieur might have left her for the time being, but I now believed it was by arrangement. He was to spoil her cousin and then return to Lubitza;—that was it! Old Tomanovich and Paulo had not been so stupid, after all! Why were Gisela and the Ingenieur parting now?

Was his errand done? With this thought the boiling began again.

"Well, Edward, have you read me yet? It should not take a practised medical man so long to arrive at a diagnosis. It inspires distrust on the part of his patient."

My kettle boiled over, at last.

"Signorina, never you *dare* use my given name again! Never, as long as you live! If you do, woman though you are, and no matter where it occurs, I swear I shall strike you on the mouth!"

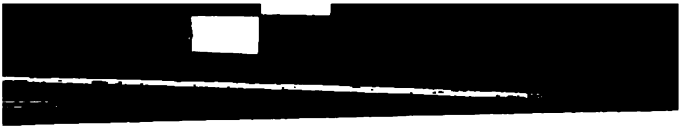
She calmly rose.

"So be it, Herr Doktor—there is the door!"

I obeyed the command, but turned, at the door, for one word more.

"I understand all! I see what your plans have been, and you seem to have succeeded. Beware, Signorina! The success of such a piece of deviltry is always a dearly bought victory! The day will surely come when you will pay!"

She heard me out, then turned and entered her boudoir, without reply. I reached the ante-room, gathered up my coat and left the house, vowing, at any cost, at any sacrifice, if it still remained possible, to turn her, and above all, the Ingenieur's roses into ashes.



CHAPTER VI

I HAD answers for most of the questions I had meant to ask, and a few more I had not thought of; but so far from congratulating, I cursed myself for a stupid dolt, who but for one false move on her part would have been, by now, in harness and hating himself. I was sorry I had gone there at all, for I would have been better off without the information I had, by chance, received. Of course I did not forget that she had let the story lose nothing in the telling; but the cardinal fact remained that Gisela had quarrelled with her uncle and left the house on the Ingenieur's account. Lubitza was too clever a woman to manufacture such a story as that —one which would be suspected at once. Moreover, it was borne out by the facts that had come to me from an independent source.

Yes, I would have been better off without the information; but I had it, now, and therefore it was to deal with. And I was in a mood to deal with it. My rage at, and hatred for, Lubitza and the Ingenieur were now equal, I was sure, to anything Gisela herself had ever felt. Moreover now, of course, I saw Gisela's past behavior to me in a different light. She had quitted me in the Cathedral in headlong excitement and anger and had remained angry, and the sight of the letter Lubitza had received, had clinched her determination and made it final; but she had not vacillated and played with me as I had supposed. She had been consistent according to her information. She had only given me the treatment she believed I had deserved, and the lack of



an opportunity to clear up the misunderstanding was to be laid at Lubitza's door. True, Gisela might have listened to me, but I remembered her high strung temperament and inexperience, remembered the fact that she really knew me but little, and the further fact that she had never had aught but falseness and intrigue round about her, and her repeated warning that she would endure no flirting with her cousin. Thus I found it easy to explain and even to forgive the position she had taken with regard to me. The blame for my fiasco was Lubitza's and I made up my mind that she and her fiancé should pay.

Finally I remembered again that Gisela's present situation was the result of my having precipitately withdrawn my protection. This fact bit deeply into my conscience and buried itself there to fester; and no ever so reasonable justification gave, now, any relief whatever from this sting.

The one thing I could neither understand nor forgive was Gisela's going to Overmann. I remembered well her emphatic uncomplimentary references to him. The memory of these added to the mystery and put it entirely beyond my depth. What legerdemain could he have used? Were his theories about women,—alas,—correct, after all? Had she really preferred "a walk in the woods?"

Well, *now* at least, all plans were simplified. I would find Gisela and offer her a marriage of expediency. Thus her estate would be saved for her, and until the very last days of her minority when that marriage could take place, I would support her and her companion.

But first I had to find her. I took the following day for this purpose, made my way to the locality and attacked the matter systematically.

When I had watched them disappear that Christmas Eve they had turned north on Türkenschanz street. By repeating it, I estimated the time my sharp run to the corner had taken, and felt sure they had not had time to reach Sternwarte street. If they had entered any house on Türkenschanz street I was sure I would have been in time to see them. As there were no westerly outlets here from Türkenschanz street it followed that they must have turned into Anton Frank street. Since this turning was a backward one in the direction they had come, I inferred that they must live near this corner, as otherwise it was reasonable to suppose they would have crossed over on Lazaristen street, and I would not have seen them at all. This locality was a nest of villas. Near here lived a world-renowned old professor of the piano and a famous vocal teacher.

I had come out early in the morning and after having accomplished this much, I walked a way down the street, so they would not run pèle-mèle upon me if they happened to appear, and seated myself upon a bench under the trees whence my eyes could command the street. Here I cooled my heels for over an hour without result, save to attract the undisguised staring of certain young and old women in a neighbouring dressmaking establishment, or what appeared to be such.

Finding this irksome at last, I wandered still farther, down to Gymnasium street where the large buildings began again, and here I spied the shop of a friseur, the which offered a suggestion. This would be their nearest friseur and they had doubtless repeatedly visited his shop to have their hair done for the opera. If so, he would surely remember that big woman.

The step proved successful. He did remember

her, and directed me to the villa which was next door but one to the abode of the singing teacher. This house was occupied by a certain Frau Blum, a widow in good circumstances, but who let part of her villa. I presented myself there and was ushered into a little drawing-room. After a few moments Frau Blum entered.

"Oh, I suppose you mean Fräulein Narishkina?"

"Yes, Gnädige Frau, Fräulein Cecilia Narishkina."

"Forgive me, Gnädiger Herr, but who are you?"

I handed her my card. She glanced at it, and then gave me a very careful looking up and down. Then she rose, closed all the doors and seated herself nearer to me.

"I am quite sure you have never been here before.".

"Never, gnädige Frau,—seldom as far as the street."

"You are seeking Fräulein Cecilie?"

"Yes, Gnädige, with the help of your kindness."

"I am sorry, but I fear I cannot give you her present address without first consulting her. She has asked me to give no one her address. She and a friend of hers have gone together, and they are trying to avoid meeting somebody, but I don't—think it—could be you. You are from the General Hospital?"

"Yes, Gnädige, from the Klinik Baumann."

So then Gisela had severed communications with the Ingenieur! That was one fact to the good, at least. I considered. It was urgent that I learn the date of Gisela's majority, and I conceived that Fräulein Narishkina would know it. Also if there were plenty of time, I wanted to help Gisela secretly and wait for a favorable opportunity before pre-

senting myself before her. An interview with Fräulein Cecilie was, therefore, the urgent matter now.

"Gnädige Frau, I do not personally know Fräulein Narishkina, but I know of her. I have an important communication for her. However, since she has requested you to give her address to no one"——

"She did. But I cannot—think she could have meant that for you. I would not like to—keep her out of anything—that is for her good. She has worked hard and things have gone none too well for her."

"It will not be necessary for me to have her address. I can meet her here, if you will kindly allow it."

"Naturally! I can send a note setting any day and hour you please."

"Let us say Tuesday afternoon at four, then."

"Good! I will attend to it."

And I returned to my apartments.

I appeared in good time at Frau Blum's villa and found Fräulein Cecilie already there. She proved to be one of the most remarkable women, in her personal appearance, I had ever seen—a Russian and a student of singing as Lubitza had once been, but who had her goal still to reach. Everything about her was emphasized, beginning with her hair and eyes, the latter being grey-blue, very large and roofed over with thick but shapely brows. Fräulein Cecilie was not corpulent,—she was just big, her face massively handsome and her figure pleasing. After I had talked with her awhile I found her a curious mixture of diplomacy and directness, as Russians are apt to be, combined with plenty of

womanly good nature. I liked her, thoroughly, from the start.

After a moment Frau Blum left us alone and Cecilie raised her eyebrows with a smile. I apologized at once and begged her not to be disappointed because my errand, though with her, was not for her personal benefit.

"I have been aware of that from the moment I saw your card. You are seeking my friend. Since seeing you, of course, I have been certain of that."

I could gather nothing from her expression.

"Gisela has spoken of me then."

"Oh, yes." And she sat back, raised her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders. Then she met my eyes, rather uncompromisingly. "Please tell me, Herr Doktor, how you learned my given name."

"Gnädiges Fräulein, I entreat your pardon a thousand times!"

"Oh, no, not at all, Herr Doktor. Indeed, since you know it, please use it. I am only curious."

"Not to be wondered at. I will tell you."

I recalled the time and place when I had heard Gisela use the name.

"Kol-lo-sal! Fabelhaft! And you were there and heard *that!"*

"Not all you said, but enough to know that Gisela was in trouble, and that her friend loved her well enough to sell her own rings so they might remain together."

She shook her finger at me with only the half of a smile.

"It was eaves-dropping! But since you had recognized her voice, it was but human. I must acquit you of blame in that, at least."

"My own conscience has already acquitted me, especially the last few days. I tried to ascertain her

address at the police office, but she was not known there. I supposed from that, that she had assumed a false name, and I made no further effort to find her. Further information has, however, made me feel that I must act for her welfare. Therefore I am here. I wish to learn two facts, to take at once one step for her benefit, and to have one promise from you. As you know who I am, I suppose you are willing to trust me?"

"Provided you do not ask me to trust you too far, Herr Doktor! I have not understood that you are overly worthy of confidence. Now do not understand *too* much from that. I have only been led to believe that you are like other men, who seem, as a rule, to think it clever to use their superior experience and better knowledge of the world in playing double with a woman."

It cut, and I rose, went to the window and looked out a bit until the stinging in my eyes should abate a little. But I resolved to make no defence, then. Finally I sat down again and faced her.

"For one thing, Herr Doktor, I will not give you our address. Of course, from my name, you can now ascertain it at the police-bureau, but I hope you will be honorable enough not to do so, or if you do, at least be kind and considerate enough not to call, or to write to my friend."

"Fräulein Cecilie, it is absolutely necessary that I know where you live so that, if necessary, I shall be able to communicate with you yourself without delay. But I promise the last part of your requirement. I agree to communicate with you only, and only by letter or messenger."

"Porzellan street, No. 58, door 16, Herr Doktor."

I took note of the address. It was within half a mile of my own apartments.

"Now, Fräulein Cecilie, do you remember ever to have heard Gisela mention the date of her coming of age?"

"Oh, yes, she has mentioned the date several times."

"When is it?"

Her face hardened.

"Of course, Fräulein Cecilie, I can ascertain it at the cost of some delay by writing to Cattaro and having it looked up in the birth register. This delay may cost your friend dear. I am her friend, Fräulein. I know you are her faithful and true friend. If I were seeking the information for any other purpose than her good, I should not come to you. This is the only further fact I shall inquire for, now."

"It is June seventeenth of this year."

I took a further note of the date and returned the note-book to my pocket. My mind was again at ease. There was plenty of time, as the date was more than four clear months away yet.

"Have you sold your rings yet?"

She smiled calmly.

"Not yet. We had a little money between us and we have lived carefully and modestly."

"Good. Don't sell them. On the first of each month you must inform me what you both have used, and I shall return you the amount in money."

She looked at me in blank surprise, then her face hardened once more. She compressed her lips.

"This sounds very like something I have heard before, Herr Doktor!"

"Yes?"

"Yes!"

My plan looked hopeless for the moment.

"You are again distrusting me, Fräulein Cecilie. Why?"

No reply.

"Fräulein, I know Gisela's situation from first to last. She needs support until the day of her majority, June seventeenth. Unless she be supported and cared for up to that date by someone who has her real welfare at heart, she is in danger."

"And if it became known that you did so, would she not be in danger?"

I inferred from this question that Fräulein Cecilie did not know that Gisela had left Cattaro to join the Ingenieur, or knowing it, had become diplomatic. Well, if she did not know it, it was no part of my duty to inform her of the fact.

"How can it ever become known, Fräulein? I shall never speak of it, and I mean to give you the monthly sum in secret and in actual cash. In fact I not only wish the matter to be a secret as regards others, but also to be kept religiously from Gisela's knowledge. How then can it ever become known? What proof would her cousin or anyone have that I have furnished the means? I pay you the funds in secret, and it will be you who supports her until that day."

"I can do it without help, Herr Doktor."

She replied less coldly but still obstinately.

"Yes, by selling your rings and by both of you living under privation! That is not necessary, nor is it fair to either of you. I am not rich, but I am abundantly able to make both of you comfortable; to make Gisela comfortable because I—because—because I am her friend; to make you also comfortable because you are her tried friend."

"Do you still love her?"

"I—I—Fräulein—that is—of the sad past. But

I am her friend—her friend as long as I have breath in my body! And for just as long, I am a friend of her friend! Believe me!"

The tears came to her fine eyes and she took my hand and pressed it warmly.

"I fear you no longer, Herr Doktor. You must forgive my distrust, for Gisela has had much reason—as you must know—and I have been her companion and confidant—and I love her. I, too, am alone in the world,—and Gisela is all I have. Forgive me, Herr Doktor!"

It is often asserted by women themselves that they can never count upon one another as true friends. Ever since this interview with Fräulein Cecilia Narishkina I have believed that women invariably find their own sex as they deserve to find it; just as is the case among men.

"So, then, Fräulein, is it agreed?"

"I suppose so, Herr Doktor. That is, I will accept enough for her. I could not think of taking anything from you for myself."

I argued this question from every standpoint, but here I found her iron. She thanked me sweetly and sincerely, met every argument courteously and considerately and her manner of refusal left no sting, but also not much room for discussion. The most I could get her promise was that if she ever needed help she would come to me. For the present, she insisted if Gisela were provided for, she would have left all and more than she needed, and they could live alike.

She promised to keep Gisela in ignorance of the new income for the present at least, all the more since she felt sure Gisela would not knowingly accept it. It was agreed that we should meet on the first of every month here at Frau Blum's. Fur-

thermore, for the present, there was to be no mention of my name to Gisela, and that should anything untoward occur, or should either have any illness or any unwelcome visitor, or meeting, she was to inform me at once either in person or by post.

"One more caution, Fräulein. In those former days in Cattaro, they succeeded by intrigue and falsehood in coming between Gisela and me. Never let that occur again! Remember that I am faithful to you both, and no matter what may be said or come up (we never can surely know beforehand, can we? No matter how careful), never judge me without hearing me!"

She answered this with a speech which I shall not transcribe here, but which has always been treasured, coming as it did from a woman, who had engaged my respect.

I returned to my duties, relieved from suspense, and it was some days before they again suffered interruption.

CHAPTER VII

THIS came from Cecilie herself. I received an urgent note to meet her at Frau Blum's villa. For such a big, ordinarily self-possessed woman, I found her in a curiously excited and well-nigh hysterical state.

Her first information was that new parties, two men with their servant, had moved into the hoch-parterre, front, in their house.

She would not have paid much attention to this were it not for the fact that the wife of the hausmeister had joyfully informed her that they must be very rich, as having liked the apartment, they had paid the tenant a high price to move out at once, and let them enter immediately.

This had seemed queer, for while the house was a fairly good one, it was not one of the modern buildings with a lift, telephones, fine hallways and other conveniences which are so keenly sought by such in Vienna as can afford them. Moreover, it was not the quarterly moving-time and the people voluntarily dispossessed would have no easy task in finding another apartment, so they must have been paid out of all proportion to the value of this one. Later she had noticed that one or other of these men was invariably at home, and that they seemed to keep watch upon her and Gisela.

She would still have suspected nothing more than the usual Viennese propensity to stare, had it not been for two subsequent occurrences. One day she was coming down the stairs, and just before reaching the bottom had stopped to tie her shoe.

Hearing her name mentioned she had stolen to the bottom step and looked around the corner, through a screen which closed off the rear end of the main corridor, and saw the hausmeister in close conversation with one of the men. She could not hear very well, but heard enough to know that she and her companion were their subject, and saw the man give the hausbesorger what she believed to be a thousand crown note. Their conversation had concluded with this and she had slipped back upstairs to the mezzanine landing and had waited ten minutes before coming down again.

The following day the hausmeister had come to their apartment in the first floor and had entered with his pass-key. She and Gisela had gone out, but their maid-servant, hearing him, came out of the kitchen and found the hausmeister in Gisela's room examining one of her trunks. When the servant had asked what he was doing there he had answered that one of the young ladies had asked him to move the trunks to the storage-room. When she asked him why he had not rung before coming in he said he had, but had had no answer and having time only then to move the trunks, he had come in anyhow. The maid had, then, told him that the whole thing was a mistake for she positively knew that her mistress was then needing the things her trunks contained. The hausmeister had then left. Later he had apologized to her (Cecilie), making the excuse that he had gone to their apartment by mistake, having misunderstood the number.

"Is your bell out of order?"

"Not at all. I tried it at once. Anna says she was in the kitchen and not asleep. She insists that the man lied."

"Does Gisela know of this?"

"No, poor dear child! She has repeatedly been in such a nervous tension lately that I did not think best to tell her about it, unless I had to. I am worried about her, Herr Doktor. She is less and less her sweet natural self every day."

"How does she behave?"

"She seems in a state of half trance a good deal of the time. Sometimes she is nervous and breaks out over the most trivial thing. But most of the time she has a perfectly immobile face and often does not hear me when I speak to her."

I did not underrate the significance of the matters Cecilie had related. It had occurred to me several times during the last few days that Lubitza and the Ingenieur were probably not idle. They had too much at stake, and Lubitza too much feeling. If I had allowed matters to drag, it had been merely because I felt I had a sure card for the playing of which there was plenty of time; not because I underrated their determination.

Now, however, it was clear that they were making another move of some sort, and furthermore that they had enlisted the dangerous help of the hausbesorger. Now the girls could never move out, start on a journey, or even leave the house, without these watchers being aware of it. I guessed that the hausmeister's visit to the apartment had been for the purpose of taking a look at the trunks so that he would know them if they should be removed from the house, say by dienstmen.

The Viennese hausmeister is, as a rule, very faithful to his charge but exceptions occur.

What should I do about it? We could go to the owner of the building and expose the fellow and the owner might or might not turn him off and have him punished, but neither we nor the hausherr

himself could put out the new occupants of the apartment. They would stay on, and the thing would repeat itself, more secretly next time.

Moreover, they would be in the same house with the girls, and while it would not be easy, still it was possible that various sorts of deviltry might be attempted or even carried out. What their plan was I could not guess. To watch her, of course; I was sure that was not all.

What they might do was not the worst of my fears. The very fact of espionage could not long be kept from Gisela and if she were in the mental state which Cecilie had described, I feared the result when it should come to her knowledge. Above all, I feared she might precipitately leave Vienna and bury herself somewhere where neither Cecilie nor I could find and help her. It was clear that I must act.

I paced the floor and thought. The only solution that occurred to me was not free from objections but since it was the only one, it was necessarily the best one, and having ever the last card in mind, I felt that it did not matter how the ones before it fell—and this very careless viewpoint constituted the capital mistake that prevented me from keeping a closer observation and foreseeing the untold misery which was destined to ensue later on. Cecilie was watching me nervously with her great eyes.

"Cecilie, do you trust me now?"

"Oh, *yes,* Herr Doktor!"

"You are willing, then, to do as I suggest?"

"Only tell me what to do, Herr Doktor!"

I explained my fears to her, and then said:

"I see only one thing to do. You two must move

to my own house. My former landlady has three apartments on the first floor. She rents two of them, and it happens just now, that she has three unoccupied rooms,—all together. It will be a little more cramped than you have had, but the house is modern, and above all, you will be safe there. We will just turn the tables on these people; for in my house *I* have the hochparterre front, and for any *good* purpose the hausmeister and his wife are my slaves. They will not bribe *my* hausmeister, nor will anybody ever trouble you in that house. I shall see to that! The rooms I mean for you are on the first floor, front. They are sunny, comfortable and quiet, and the landlady is a good friend of mine and one of the best women in Vienna. Moreover, she also is a Dalmatian woman, herself coming from not far from Cattaro, and Gisela will find, in her, a fellow-countrywoman and friend. Will you come?"

"Oh, Herr Doktor, at once, if I have the decision! But of course Gisa must consent."

"Certainly. Now, of course, Gisela must be informed that you know me—we can no longer conceal that. But she need not know that I am helping her with money. All she needs to know is, that you have known me some time and that I shall from now on be the protector of both of you. I shall leave it to your woman's wit to explain why you have not told her sooner. Then you must tell her the things you have told me to-day. She will have to be told in order to understand the need of moving at once. If she will consent, pack to-night, and move tomorrow."

"They will know that we come to your house?"

"Of course they will. They will follow and make sure of it. Don't make the slightest attempt at

concealment. Don't tell anybody where you are going; it is nobody's business but your own; but move openly in the most matter-of-fact every-day manner. Give your landlady notice to-morrow morning, and pay your rent for the full two weeks' notice time in advance, with an extra hundred crown note. Then it will be none of your landlady's business either."

"I will do just as you say, if Gisa will consent."

"Very well. Go and consult her at once and I will go home and speak for the rooms. I will meet you at six o'clock sharp in the Café Schwarzspanierhof. Do you know it? Very well, at six sharp. Then you can give me your and Gisela's decision, and your new landlady will prepare for and expect you some time tomorrow."

She started for the door, but turned back.

"If Gisa should be afraid to leave, could you not come and be present when we go?"

"Yes, if you like, but there will be no trouble about leaving in broad daylight. The fellows will not trouble you. They will only follow. Let them. I'll guarantee that their following will end at our door—or sooner!"

She flew down the steps and I went home to engage the rooms. I found my former landlady a sympathetic listener and when I left her, I was certain that anybody who attempted to trouble them, once they were under her wing, would have a determined woman to deal with.

In the meantime I decided to make a bold attempt to learn what the plans of these men had been. If they wanted open war, they should have it.

At six I found Cecilie waiting for me. She said that Gisela had turned the color of blood at the news

of our acquaintanceship but had told her to carry to me her greetings and thanks. Gisela had been exasperated and frightened at the news, and was anxious to move at once. They had decided to follow the plan as I had arranged it, and would leave their house at three o'clock the following afternoon.

"By the way, what name does Gisela use?"

"Her *own*, to be sure!"

"Tomanovich?"

"No. Portulan."

So she had not used a false name.

"How did it happen that I could not find her in the police bureau last Christmas week?"

"Oh," said Cecilie with a smile, "she did not fill out and send the police slip for nearly ten weeks after arriving."

"Did her landlady not get fined?"

"Oh, yes. Gisela and I clubbed together and paid it."

"Well, lock your doors to-night and do not go out."

I followed her, and entered the house about ten minutes after she had disappeared within. My plan was simple. I meant to have a look at the men, and was in no mood for strategy. I went to their door and rang. A servant opened and I promptly pushed by her and walked into the first lighted room. As soon as I entered I found myself face to face with no less a person than Baron Ascher. Of course this rencontre surprised me no little but it so promptly established the connection between this little menage and Lubitza's party that instant rage and hatred left little time for my surprise to be noticed, I was sure. He rose up in astonishment.

"Ah, Herr *Doktor!* To what am I indebted for"——

I raised my hand and he was silent.

"You must be hard pressed for money, Baron! Or is there more than one reason for this enterprise? Hereafter you will have me to deal with instead of a couple of women!"

With this I left his apartment and sought the one of the hausebesorger. His door stood open and I walked in, closed the door behind me and locked it. He was sitting at table in his kitchen disposing of a tumbler of wine and a plate of some strong-smelling thing or other. His wife, if he had one, was absent. He was a round-headed, rather jovial-faced man. I pushed his plate away and pulled him, in his chair, away from the table. I looked him in the eye and he grinned uncertainly.

"How much has that fellow across the hall paid you to spy upon two women here in the house? It was a thousand-crown note, wasn't it?"

He gathered himself together a little.

"A thousand crown note! I haven't even seen such a thing in fifteen years!"

"Look you, my fine fellow! You were seen to receive it by a person who was coming down the stairs, and a part of your conversation was heard. It was out there in the back corridor. You will gain nothing by denying it! Now that is a high price to pay for merely spying. What else were you to do for this money?"

He grew red with rage and I saw him measure me with his eye. I reached for his knife and fork and threw them into the other end of the room.

"You keep still in your chair or I'll twist out both of your arms! What else were you to do? Sit back in your chair! So!—What else was there?"

"Well, there wasn't much more. They wanted a key to the house-door."

"Ah! A key to the street door. Well, did you furnish it?"

"Yes."

"When was that?"

"About ten days ago."

"A house door key is worth three crowns, and the privilege of having it six crowns a month. It was still high pay. What else were you to do?"

He started to make a spring at me, but he was very slow; also he was fifty and I was twenty-six and not a drinker of "heuriger." I was on him before he had half risen and readily got him from behind by both arms, bearing him down with my weight. I twisted one of his arms across his back. The chair slipped out from under him and he sunk in a sort of ball on to the floor with me on top of him. I pulled the arm a little higher.

"If you yell, I'll twist your arm clear out, Mr. Hausbesorger! Quiet now! What else were you to do for those fellows!"

"I can't tell you—while—you are hurting me so!"

I let him go and stood up.

"I will tell you all about it, gnädiger Herr, but I beg your mercy. It will ruin my chance for employment forever if it be told."

"You will lose nothing by being straight-forward and you will lose everything if you be not."

He ceased rubbing his shoulder and looked up at me.

"I did not want to do it, gnädiger Herr, but they had already given me the thousand crown note and promised that they would give me four thousand more after the thing was done, and to protect me from harm. He is a baron and I had heard of him before and I thought he could do it."

"Well?"



"Well, gnädiger Herr, the baron said he was in love with the smaller lady, and wanted to take her away some night after the house door was closed. I was not to help but only to keep in my apartment and not to hear or see anything."

"How were they going to do it?"

"I don't know, gnädiger Herr. But the big woman often goes to the opera and they often let their maid servant go in the evenings. The smaller woman is often at home alone after ten. I suppose they had a way to manage. That apartment is rather detached and this is an old house with solid stone floors, not like the flimsy buildings they are putting up now."

It had been a very pretty little plan and with only a little invention and address, no doubt it would have succeeded. I was fairly mad to file information with the police against Ascher and his companion, but it was not to be thought of until the girls were safely out of the house and possibly not then for a while. Any compromising of them would be too readily seized upon, and I did not care to invite this needlessly even if we did hold the final winning card.

But rage finally gave way to congratulation. The success of their plan would have settled the whole question, without a doubt. As it was now, we could laugh at them.

The moving was accomplished without incident, the following afternoon, and the presence of myself and the police officer down at the corner was not needed. In the evening, when our hausbesorger admitted me, he informed me that they were safely installed in their new home.

CHAPTER VIII

I DID not even see either of them until the following Sunday for the days at the hospital were busy ones at this time. That morning I received a note from Cecilie inviting me to tea at five o'clock. Up to this time I had taken care to avoid the inevitable meeting mainly because I felt it would be difficult, and besides if they wanted me I wished them to send for me. But of course it had to come, and Cecilie or both of them had known the best way. There is nothing like a tea-tray for smoothing over a difficult interview, a fact with which women seem very generally to be acquainted. I hunted out Lubitza's old letter and put it into my pocket.

Cecilie received me and wrung both of my hands.

"Well, you are yourself again, I see."

"We both seem to be, thanks to you. Gisela went out at three and has not returned, but I am expecting her every minute. We will wait a little for her."

"I am glad she is not here yet, for I have something important to tell you. This affair was far more serious than we were thinking."

I had debated the question of informing them of the abduction plan, but had decided that Cecilie, at least, must know it; for what had miscarried this time might succeed on the street, or at some favorable opportunity. Now that Gisela was under the same roof with me and removed from attack while at home, I conceived that Lubitza might take even a more desperate risk. So, amid plenty of sur-

prise and many exclamations, I acquainted her with their intentions.

"Now, Cecilie, I think Gisela must be informed. Let her continue to believe that you are supporting her, but tell her all the rest. She has a right to know and it is also safer so. I shall also explain the situation to your landlady so she will be careful about visitors when you are not at home."

"Very well. I'll tell her, Herr Doktor."

"I have arranged with our hausmeister to report to me anything that attracts his attention, and I myself am on the ground floor. No girl will be stolen from the house, at least. Gisela's only risk, now, is when she is out."

"I shall try always to go with her, especially in the evenings."

"Good. And always have the hausmeister order your carriage. I have arranged this with him. If you are downtown in the evening and must take a carriage, be careful never to take one whose driver solicits you. Never allow anybody, man or woman, to cause you to enter a carriage or a building or to alter your plans, under any excuse. How about your housemaid? Who and what is she?"

"We brought her from the other place."

"Discharge her at once! Pay her in full for your agreed notice, but let her go at once—tomorrow. Get your landlady to find you a maid she knows. You can go a day or two without a servant. Then, when your new maid comes, don't give her her nights out. She is entitled to every other Sunday but give her no more. Then she won't have so much chance to make acquaintances. Give her an extra five-crown piece once a week. She will be only too satisfied with that"——

A merry laugh interrupted this. I looked around

toward the door to the next room and saw Gisela's bright face, near by once more, after more than two years.

I had prepared and steeled myself for this moment, but not to much purpose. I was unable to speak to or greet her. The false indifference which I had managed to manufacture during our long separation was roughly torn aside, as I sub-consciously had known it would be. Her own face grew grave as she came up and took my hand. I felt sure she had misunderstood the cause of my silence, but it could not be helped just now.

She scarcely looked older, though a little careworn. After her first laugh I saw her face take on that immobility of expression which Cecilie had described.

"Welcome, Doctor Ransome! We have much to thank you for, and thanking you will be a pleasure."

"A thousand welcomes, Signorina! I am going to make it my business to stand by you now. Believe me, I would have done so sooner if I had known it was needed."

"Thank you, Signor. I hope we shall not prove too troublesome."

"For your sake, not my own, I can second that wish."

"Come, let us have tea," interrupted Cecilie.

We seated ourselves around the little table.

"Sugar, Herr Doktor?"

"I need much sweetening, as my old acquaintances always insist."

"We all do. I need it most when I start to button up my waist."

"And I when I am in a hurry and find that I have tied my necktie with one end longer than the other."

"I, when a shoe string breaks," said Gisela.

"What happens then?"

"The same thing that happens when your necktie ends are found to be uneven, Signor."

"Really?"

"She starts to sing," said Cecilie.

"To sing! Hum—then it is *not* the same!"

"Gisela sings whenever she is at a loss for words; sings in her sleep, too!"

"Why, Cecilie!"

"She is just like any song bird. I love it!" Gisela gave her a hug and a kiss.

"Ah, Herr Doktor, you would not believe how patient Cecilie is with me!"

"I have not noticed the hardship. No doubt Gisa has to be patient sometimes, too."

"By the way, Cecilie, you are a singer, too, are you not? Tell me something of your work."

She told her short story. Lubitza's gay recital had been that of the successful human song-bird. Cecilie's portrayed the other side. Her story was cheerful and matter-of-fact, looking for no sympathy—a simple tale of a brave struggle which up to now had failed, but which would be kept up until either success or failure would be assured.

"Have you tried in Berlin?"

"Oh, yes, a long time ago. But I am better now. I have been promised a chance at a full dress rehearsal there in May, and I shall stop there for that purpose on my way home."

"I hope you will be engaged, Cecilie. You are going to leave us in May, then?"

"Yes, Herr Doktor. I shall leave Vienna with regret, but a foreigner has to be pretty nearly at the top to start with before she has any chance against their local jealousies here. If I be engaged

at Berlin I shall be there next season. Now, Herr Doktor, I am going to ask you to excuse me for a half hour. I am sorry to be so discourteous, but I have an urgent letter to write which must be posted this evening. As soon as that is attended to I shall return. I wish to see you a moment before you go, so please wait for me—won't you?"

I perfectly understood the transparent excuse and her motives for it. If Gisela had misunderstood my silence at her entrance and the reasons for it, I felt certain that Cecilie, the onlooker, had not.

But her action suited my wishes. The Ingenieur stood between Gisela and me. Still, although that fact might never be explained satisfactorily (and I determined never to broach it to her) there still remained much to clear up between us. She should know how Lubitza had befooled me with her letter; learn that I had not played love in Cattaro but had been true, as I now knew she had not played. The half hour would be sufficient for that much, and the rest could keep.

Cecilie left the room and Gisela and I looked at each other in silence. If either could have smiled —I bethought me of one of Harry's aphorisms: "When in doubt, smile!"—but I could not, and Gisela did not. My tongue, usually a very faithful member, failed me again to-day. No diplomatic start would come. Gisela began to grow crimson and bent her head over her tea-cup. It must have been three minutes or more before anything was said by either. Realizing that this would never do, I forced out the first words that came into my head, bluntly and uncleverly.

"Signorina, I did not ask Cecilie to do so, but I have an idea she has left us because she thought I

wished it. Well, I am glad, for I have something to tell you. I saw Lubitza recently, and happened to light upon the curious mistake which, as I think, was what came between you and me in Cattaro."

With my beginning she grew still higher in color, and drooped her head still more; but the instant I uttered her cousin's name, her face paled again, and she raised her head and faced me. Now again her face was wearing that impassive mask which accorded so ill with her natural brightness and vivacity. This impassive expression was not like Lubitza's calmness under stress, but curiously recalled it, with a difference. The thought came to me, in this trying moment, that this power of putting on a mask had probably come down to both cousins as a heritage from their old time Venetian great-grandmother, who, unless history was very untruthful, must so often have needed it. The chief difference between Lubitza's and Gisela's masks, seemed to be that in Gisela's case the mask was involuntary. Moreover Lubitza's mask fitted her temperament; Gisela's did not, at all.

After a wait, Gisela answered, now looking into her tea-cup again:—

"I think that perhaps the least we talk of those days, the better, Herr Doktor. You seem to be my friend now, and I can not say that you have ever been otherwise than a good friend. I would rather just take you so, and never recall those other days."

Of course my understanding of Gisela was limited—I had loved, and did love her; but I had known her hardly at all. Therefore it is not altogether to be wondered at that my reasoning strayed far afield when I heard this answer. I assumed, simply, that she did not desire an explanation to occur between us. She realized, I thought, that

if I cleared up my side of our misunderstanding, I would expect a like return from her; and this she could not give,—could not afford to give;—and she was grandly above mere falsehood. And so, I believed, she preferred to begin anew;—as mere friends. Of course any love she may have had for me in those days had, long since, been forgotten. Certainly! Thus, such a position, on her part, should not surprise me.

But it was not in my human nature to remain silent, and in the wrong,—however silent I might be after the correction.

"Signorina, be assured that I shall never use my new position with you as a means of intrusion, unless I feel that it must be so for some good reason or other. I can, and shall be, your faithful friend without a further word of the past. Above all I am not going to ask about a single particular of your life which you feel to be none of my affair, or which you choose, for any reason, to withhold from me. I ask no explanation from you. I only meant to speak of a matter which affects me only."

I could not say that her expression was unkind—still less was it repellant. Even in high anger her face had not been the latter. Neither could I see any signs of softening in the mask she wore. She only gazed at me silently.

"Have I your permission to proceed, Signorina?"

"You have already said you were unwilling to intrude unless for a good reason. I infer, then, that your subject is an urgent one. Certainly, then —proceed, Herr Doktor."

"It is urgent, as a matter of common justice to me. You will remember that you left me in seeming great anger at our last meeting in the cathedral. I thought at the time and still believe it was more

fright than anger, and that if nothing else unfortunate had happened in the meantime, our next meeting would have been at least a kind one. Am I right?"

"Quite right, Herr Doktor. And?"

"At our next next and final meeting at the door of your room, you sent me away in terms that left no choice but obedience."

"I remember. Well?"

"Therefore, something had happened in the meantime. Now furthermore, in sending me finally away, you used words which I utterly failed to understand, but which I never forgot. They were: 'Falser than the very Shades themselves. Go to my cousin. You were made for each other and it would be a sin to keep you apart.'"

"I said more than I should;—more than hospitality should have permitted. But I was highly wrought up. That must be my excuse. For the rest, it—Signor, need we go further?"

"A little more and I have done. I know, now, Signorina, both the reason for, and the significance of, your words; but I did not then. At that time they amazed me beyond your belief; for while you, believing as you did, were not unjustified, yet I was innocent of the cause."

There was no answer to this—only the mask greeted me; beautiful, but a mask.

I continued.

"Of course the reason for it all was, that Teresa found and showed you a letter which Lubitza had received from me."

"Not *quite* correct, Herr Doktor. My cousin brought it to me herself."

"I am not surprised. I only know, up to now, what Lubitza chose to tell me. Signorina, that let-

ter was never meant for Lubitza. In writing it, I supposed I was writing to you. I had received a letter which I thought had come from you. You remember how we had parted at the cathedral. I was more than half expecting a letter from you when you should get over your fright. Such a letter came—I thought it was from you. True, it was *not* the kind of a letter I was expecting—exactly—and it puzzled me—but I believed it was from you, and I was relieved and glad to have any line at all from you. The letter you read was my answer, sent back by the bearer, who I thought was Teresa—the letter had been given to a waiter in the Dojmi. I thought it would go straight to you."

The mask at least was gone, and in its place reigned first an incredulous astonishment, and following that, settled incredulity itself.

"I do not expect you to accept this explanation without taking a little time to think it over, and to examine the letters. It took me quite a few moments to realize it, and I was in a better position to understand than you are just now. Lubitza told me you had kept the letter she had received. Was this true?"

"Oh, yes, I still have it."

"It's real owner is in possession of it then. Here is the letter I received."

She took the letter with a half quizzical smile and read it through, still in clear scepticism.

"The hand-writing does not even resemble mine."

"I had never seen the script of either of you."

"Not a word of apology from me. Not a reference to anything we had in common!"

"I have already told you, Signorina, that the letter puzzled me. But I took the mere fact of

your writing at all as apology enough, and the lack of reference to anything in common as mere caution on your part. Now, Signorina, please recall that our final parting was the next thing that occurred between us. Now you will understand my amazement and why I looked upon you as a vacillating, whimsical and undependable woman whom it were better to forget if I could. So I left Cattaro—with no further attempt to see you."

"If you were writing to me, what did you mean by the 'little arrangement' you mentioned?"

"Our arrangement to exchange letters through the banker."

"Oh! But in this letter my cousin also speaks of an 'arrangement.' What was that?"

This was a question which had worried me in advance. My careless words to Lubitza had meant nothing whatever, more than a joking half-assent in order to get rid of her. But I felt it would be difficult to get Gisela to understand this, especially as I felt a delicacy about relating Lubitza's open invitation to an intrigue. And yet I had not seen my way to an evasion either of the question or the answer.

Gisela saw my hesitation.

"Never mind, Herr Doktor. I understand. You are like other men;—that is all. Do not trouble to answer." And she crushed the letter and threw it from her.

"Signorina, I must answer in justice to myself. If I hesitated it was through no guilty conscience but because I have read unbelief, constantly, in your face. This makes it difficult for me, but nevertheless I must have the matter out with you.

Your cousin did invite me to come and call when she would come to Vienna. I could not re-

fuse off-hand, Signorina. I had called at your house in Perzagno and could not refuse her the code of courtesy. I agreed to call in Vienna; that was all there was of any 'arrangement' as far as I was aware. I meant, if I should keep my word at all, to make a mere formal call—as formal as possible. I had no wish for even a word with your cousin! Were my friend Harry McClellan here he could tell you how I was thinking only of you those days, for I kept nothing from him."

"And you went to see her—not quite formally, for your interview seems to have had a confidential tendency. Otherwise how did the the truth of the letters come out so thoroughly?"

Again she had me, this time where no answer or evasion was possible. Her mind was not idle just now. She was doing her own thinking, and had a most perverse way of sticking to the point. There remained nothing to do but to close *this* avenue of catechism under as dignified a retreat as possible.

"Remember your last words to me, Signorina. You had sent me finally away. As a fact, I never saw your cousin again until last spring—less than a year ago, when she appeared in opera here. I did not mean to call upon her then, but I met her at my friend's début, and with him was invited to dinner. I was guilty of the solecism of making no return call after this dinner. I never again called upon your cousin until after I had seen you again, here in Vienna. When I did call it was not for the purpose of paying her a courtesy but in order to extract what information I could about your present condition and circumstances, for I had no other source of information. In our interview she happened incautiously to mention the name—her childhood name 'Cara,' and this chance mention, of

course, told me the whole story. We had a furious quarrel and I left her;—for all time."

"By that time you had forgotten poor little Gisela in Perzagno—and the seeing of her again here had brought back some curiosity—mayhap a mild interest. Yes. After such a parting as we had, and after two years' separation, you were no longer under obligation to remember me. I understand. I can see it all. I know my cousin, Herr Doktor, and know her methods. You are to be congratulated that a combination of favorable chances and more or less keenness on your own part has enabled you to see my cousin as she is, at last. I only hope that things had not gone too far between you before you found her out. I say that, not for my sake, because my rights over you were annulled, as you hint, at our last interview;—but for your own sake."

I was silent.

"And now you come to me! Yes! The explanation is well constructed! I feel guilty, Herr Doktor. I fear I do not do you justice. This explanation ought to be believed. Its ingenuity deserves no less. Perhaps later on I shall be able to accept it. I will try."

Remembering my fiasco the night of the ball, I managed to keep my temper this time. But the thought did half sadly recur that after all the blood of Albina Portulan ran in the veins of not one, but both, of the cousins—indeed more of it in Gisela than in the other one. To have passed the speech with no reply at all, was however, beyond me.

"Signorina, there are times when you and your cousin resemble one another in your dispositions."

"That is, perhaps, to be expected," she calmly

answered. "But I shall pray that our differences are much more marked."

"The Giver of all good things has already quite sufficiently answered that prayer. You need now only pray for a better understanding of your friends."

After a pause:—

"So you and my cousin have quarrelled?"

"Bitterly! And finally! Need you ask, when you remember that the truth about the letters came out at our interview?"

"If this explanation be true, I can perfectly understand that it ended any previous friendship you may have had. Certainly, Signor—you must forgive me if this take a little time to filter in. It doubtless will. I don't believe I can quite explain my state of mind, Herr Doktor. My *reason* tells me that you have spoken the truth. My *reason* tells me that if you have not told the whole truth, you have only kept back what does not concern me, and what it would do no good for me to hear. It is only—that there is something inside of me—which won't—*let* me tell you that I believe it,—yet. But I do believe that you are my friend now, at any rate—and I am yours. Let us, then, be friends;—good friends, and simply forget everything else for a little while!"

She held out her hand and I took it. The bargain was sealed. How could I blame her if "something inside wouldn't *let* her believe" just yet? And I thought I understood. Besides, in most of her life she had met with but little to inspire confidence in others. Cecilie had been, as yet, her only tried friend.

My mind flew back over that summer in Cattaro

and I remembered my night ride after parting with her.

"Signorina, I have a question to ask. A mere matter of curiosity. The evening I last saw you in your home, I had come over horseback. As I was returning to Cattaro that night, I saw a light and thought I heard my name called from Le Tre Sorelle as I passed. My horse was very fractious and bolted at the instant, and I did not get him pulled up for a long distance. Was this a real call, or did I imagine it?"

"It was real, Signor"—she answered gravely. "But I did not know about it until long afterward. Teresa had gone there of her own accord. She waited awhile for you to come back, but concluded you had not seen her signal or heard her. She said you had been carried away by a spirit horse and left in a swamp!"

"Alas!"

"She also went to Cattaro to find you the following afternoon, but you and your friend had departed. But I did not know of it, Signor, and—when she told me, weeks afterwards, we had a big cr——. Cecilie is taking a long time over her letter! I'll call her."

"And I must be going, Signorina. I have long since exceeded the limits of a tea invitation, I fear."

"Oh, surely we are not going to be so formal with one another as that! Cecilie and I both hope you will come up often. It will be very absurd of you to wait for an invitation—Cecilie!"

Cecilie opened the door.

"The Doctor says he has stayed too long for a tea invitation!"

"Oh—Oh!" scoffed Cecilie. "Well, how shall we invite him next time? To stay altogether?"

"God forbid! Then he wouldn't come at all!"

"Better not risk it! Are we going to the opera together some evening soon?"

I had found a happy theme at the last, at any rate. All of us were music lovers and I soon knew what operas they wished to hear.

"Only,"—said Gisela.

"Yes, certainly! I perfectly understand. I'll look at the title rôle before I take any places."

As I was leaving Gisela asked:—

"By the way, when is your friend to give his concerts here? They were once announced but have been withdrawn."

"I do not understand that any more than you do. My last letter from Harry still gave the last week of this month. Since then I have not heard."

"I hope he is not ill or having any other misfortune. Cecilie, you will go mad over him. He is just your ideal, through and through. I am just burning to see you meet!"

Cecilie laughed tolerantly.

"He won't fall in love with a giantess."

"You never can tell!" I answered.



CHAPTER IX

BUT only a few days later Harry appeared at my door without a word of warning in advance. After the first uproarious greetings he explained that he had had to postpone his dates on account of an overworked hand, and had now come down to make new arrangements. He would be here some days and might remain until the date of his concerts if the hall proved to be free within a reasonable time.

Of course Harry was greatly surprised at my news for I had written him nothing of my new situation, nor even the fact that Gisela was in the city. We had a long talk that evening and I told him everything, including my experience with Lubitza. After I had finished he ate awhile in silence —for this recital was during our dinner. Finally he asked:—

"Are you not a little afraid they will try to use the fact that the Signorina is here under the same roof with you?"

"I thought of it, but they have the better thing to use, and their being here cannot add much. Therefore, balanced against her need of protection, I considered that danger negligible."

"Lubitza and the Ingenieur will not be idle!"

"Yes, I know. But, Harry, her only real danger, now, is that she reach her majority without a marriage. I can marry her, and save her property for her in that way."

"Have you spoken to her about that?"

"Not yet. There is plenty of time. Her majority is June seventeenth."

"If you really mean to do that, the sooner you arrange it with her the better, Ed! The people on the other side have always been unscrupulous and in that abduction plan they showed glimmerings of ingenuity. They may make you trouble here, too. She is probably safe, as you say, as long as she is in the house; but she cannot always be in. It is not easy to foresee every possibility they may take successful advantage of, or how far they might go. For instance, the Signorina herself is not their only possible point of attack. They may settle *you* some dark night, and what then? Have you thought of that?"

"If that happens, Harry, you will act in my place!"

"That is a heavy call upon friendship, Ed!"

"I am not joking, Harry! If anything happens to me, promise you will do it! It is only a formal step. You can have it annulled later."

"Very well,—I promise," he answered gravely. "But if you have really decided, you would better begin getting her used to the idea for the sake of both of you. The value of that estate is a heavy stake in Europe, to say nothing of the personal feeling behind the matter. If they don't stab you in the back, they may do some other devilish thing to you—or to her. They probably have some card up *their* sleeve, too, and you may be sure they know *your hand*. Do you not imagine the possibility of her marrying in the last day or two of her minority has not occurred to two such clever intriguers as Lubitza and Overmann? Without waiting for a reply he continued:—

"It all depends upon whether you have made up

your mind to do it, or not. If not, then wait until you have, because once having arranged it, you must keep faith. But if you have decided, why wait? It is due her to have a certainty of something or other and you are running various risks in waiting; risks for both."

The truth of the matter was that I had not decided—or if I had, I had at least not reached the sticking point. Even in case of a formal marriage I wanted to know why she had left home; why she had intrigued with the Ingenieur, and how far it had gone. I felt I could readily take her word of honor for whatever she chose to tell me about it—not a doubt of that. She would be too proud to lie;—a nature such as hers is almost always above subterfuge—and impatient of it in others, as well.

However, Harry's words woke me up from this dozing. No, in four months I would be no nearer a decision than I was now. The fact that if anything should happen to me she would be left helpless had never presented itself. This contingency seldom does occur to us, unless we be reminded of it.

So the result of Harry's words was that I settled the matter, summarily.

The occasion for suggesting the move would have to be one on which I would have time and opportunity to present the matter tactfully. I did not wish any misunderstanding of my motives, yet I must succeed; so it was not an interview for two or three minutes' time with Cecilie likely to run in every moment. However, the opportunity came sooner than I was expecting.

The quartette of us had gone to the opera and had actually entered the box and seen the curtain rise before we realized that there had taken place

one of those summary and incomprehensible changes of program without notice which the Viennese opera lover so often has to endure from the management of the royal opera. Instead of Siegfried, as we were expecting, the curtain had risen for the first act of La Boheme. I remembered immediately that Lubitza had sung the title rôle of this opera every time it had been presented that winter. I stepped into the cloak room of the loge to a light and looking at the cast, saw that Lubitza was, in fact, to sing. I came back and informed Gisela. She rose at once to leave. After a hurried consultation we decided that Harry and Cecilie should remain—there was no reason why they should not do so.

As it was less than half past seven when we reached home, Gisela courteously invited me to come up for a while, and somewhat to her surprise, I think, I accepted.

After we had made ourselves comfortable in chairs, I found myself facing the most difficult moment of my life. With some women it would not have been such a puzzle, but Gisela was of another clay.

How to do my errand without emotion and at the same time have her not make any mistake as to the formal nature of my proposal and without wounding her pride—furnished a combination that gave me a headache. Furthermore, Gisela did not seem to be in the right mood. She was bright and talkative. She had not actually seen Lubitza, so nothing had happened to depress her. Lately, in general, she had seemed a little more her old self, and although there had not been one moment of confidence, still she had come, once more, to treat me very much as she had done formerly when

others were by,—with her usual gracious smile and gay banter. She was in that mood to-night and it went against the grain to bring up any unpleasant subject.

However, Harry had egged me into haste. Besides I did not expect her to see the wisdom of the step at once. She would need some days to consider it, so more time would be lost.

"I had a narrow escape," she remarked, after a laugh over our hasty exit from the opera house, "thanks to you."

"Yes. It is not always easy to avoid people even by vigilance. And yet it is a pity you cannot hear your cousin sing. Whatever else she be, she is a great artist, and growing greater."

"But she is also these other things, and I could never lose these in the artist, dearly as I love the opera. Nor do I believe you could, either, Herr Doktor, were you in my place."

"It makes a difference whose hair is pulled—all the difference between laughing and crying. I wonder how she would have sung if you had remained and she had seen you."

"Better than usual, I fancy."

"Yes, I believe she would have.—Signorina."

"Well, Herr Doktor?"

"Has Cecilie told you of the narrow escape you had in the other house?"

"Yes, and how you forced the thing out of the hausbesorger. I owe you much, Herr Doktor. If I have not thanked you it is only because I have not had a good opportunity. I will do so now"——

"Nay, nay, you owe me nothing! Nothing whatever! I only asked because there is a matter I wish to talk over with you, and it is necessary that you understand your situation before I mention it.

Forgive me for bringing up the subject, but I wish to protect you, and time is flying. May I talk with you unreservedly?"

"Certainly, Herr Doktor. Are you not my proven good friend? You have the right. Pray do so."

She gravely settled herself in the chair and looked at me inquiringly.

"You come of legal age on this seventeenth of June, do you not?"

"Yes, Signor, that is the date."

"I ascertained the date from Cecilie."

"I know."

"Signorina, I do not know if you yet believe my explanation of the letter Lubitza received. You have never told me"——

"Oh, yes, Signor. It has filtered through—or rather the thing that wouldn't let me tell you so, has given over resistance. I have had my first scolding from Cecilie on that subject. She insists that I do not deserve to have any friends," this with a laugh—"The sun no longer rises and sets for Cecilie. Now, the day, for her, is reckoned by you, Signor."

"Cecilie would better stick to steady old Sol. Besides, methinks another sun has risen for her."

"Oh, she is charmed with your friend. Not a doubt of it! Why not?"

"Why not, indeed! But I must return to my subject, Signorina. Well, you understand your danger, then?"

"I understand perfectly. They will ruin me if they can, by any way that seems feasible. There is no depravity too deep for my cousin and her fiancé. I know all that better than you do, Herr Doktor."

I gazed at her in wonderment. Since she still spoke of the Ingenieur in those terms, how had he been able to entice her from her home? And of course this was not being honest with me. She did not know that I knew that she had gone to him, and was going to lie to me after all. My heart went down with disappointment.

I determined to give her no chance to tell me a falsehood. I could not bear it.

"But, Signorina, do you realize their cleverness? Do you realize that their plot to carry you off would probably have succeeded? And do you realize what it would have meant?"

"Yes, it might have succeeded—we were two weak women, often alone in our rooms. And, yes, I understand that it would have ruined me."

"I must tell you one more thing. This Baron Ascher who was to do it, is a more dangerous and unscrupulous man than the Ingenieur. He has been in many a scrape with women and girls, and has had more than one near escape from serious trouble. I happen to know that he has but little money left, and in consequence he must be desperate and ready for anything. You have, therefore, not two but even four enemies, for Ascher can count for two such as your cousin and her fiancé."

"At least I have two good friends, have I not, Signor?"

"Even three, as I shall explain to you later. Three friends who are not bought ones, and who will do their best for you. But, Signorina, while we may succeed in protecting you, yet we all believe that waiting is very dangerous—in more ways than one. We must not make the mistake of underrating the ability of those people to do harm. Since they have enlisted Ascher, I am afraid—I

confess it. He knows Vienna as he knows his own house, and if anybody can advise and serve them, he can."

"Well, Herr Doktor, what am I to do? I am sure you have some advice for me, or you would never tell me these things."

"Quite right, Signorina. I have something for you. But as it is something you will not like, it is necessary that you realize your situation before it is suggested."

"Am I to go into a convent after all—at my age?"

"No—no! That would not help you now," I answered sadly. "But there is one very simple and easy way by which we can eventually put you utterly out of their power and into a position in which you will be relieved of suspense and be safe."

"And yet you hint I shall not like the means! For such a result the means would not matter. How is it to be done, Signor?"

"By the terms of your great-grandmother's will, if you marry legally before your next birthday, you will be qualified for your heritage, at once. I have talked over the matter with one of the best attorneys in Vienna and he has assured me that the courts will hold that the clear meaning of this clause in the will is merely that you be correctly settled in life before your coming of age. Therefore, he says, a legal marriage—with any proper party will qualify you for your inheritance on the day you come of age. Our only care is that they must not know of the marriage until it be too late for them to start an action to annul it. So the marriage must take place during the last two or three days of your minority and somewhere else than in Austria."

She laughed unreservedly.

"Ah, Signor, does a woman pick a husband, in Vienna, as one would a flower? Do they grow so luxuriantly here? Are the gardens pretty?"

"Much overgrown with weeds, I fear—but that is neither here nor there. The matter is grave and our joking would better be reserved until after your safety is assured. Then we may joke all we like."

"Very well, Signor," still smiling, "I am serious. Where am I to find him?"

"Go secretly to England and live there until you come of age. A few days before that date I will join you and we can be married there. It is simple."

Her face grew blood red. She gave me a hurried look and then bent her eyes upon her hands, which were trembling. A dozen emotions swept over her face—embarrassment, uncertainty and question alternating. Her lips opened as if to answer, and closed again. She gave me one final, long, studying look, and then here eyes sought her hands once more.

"It is your only way to be safe, Signorina. Of course you care nothing for me except as a good friend, but for the present that will not matter. Once in England, and married, your troubles are settled and in the meantime you can continue to live as you have been doing, until your majority. Of course I shall never disturb you. I shall remain your good friend and never presume upon the new relationship in any way whatsoever. You will see me then just as you see me now—when I am invited to call. Then after your majority is attained and your estate is safely adjudged to you, we can go to some other country and have the

marriage annulled, and you will be your own mistress before the world."

She looked up but once during the speech and then kept her head down. I saw the pretty under lip grow just a little more full and did not like the sign. But the fullness passed again, and she grew pale and the paleness remained. Finally she said with evident effort:—

"As I understand you, Herr Doktor, you are not offering to marry me because you love me or want me; you are offering yourself as a temporary sacrifice to help me to receive my estate, after which we are to part and go our separate ways. Am I right?"

"That is what I am suggesting *now,* Signorina, and there is no question or thought of a sacrifice in the matter, for either of us. It will not change our lives."

She thought awhile.

"Whom do you mean by my third friend, Herr Doktor? I know only you and Cecilie."

"My friend, Harry McClellan, is also your friend, Signorina. He has promised that if anything happen to me, he will take my place in this affair."

She looked up.

"You mean in this marriage of convenience?"

"Yes, Signorina. Harry has more honor than I, or any other man I know."

"I doubt if he has *more,* Signor—though I must look upon him as a very true friend of yours, at least."

Again a silence. She seemed very busy with a refractory fold in her skirt.

"Is this the entire plan, Signor?"

"There is only further that I will take care to

settle your full estate upon you in advance, by legal renunciation."

"I was not thinking of that."

Again a long silence.

"Have you no further word for me, Signor?"

Of course I understood her in part, but I could not meet it. Besides, I could not gather why she wanted me to tell her I loved her. She certainly did not love *me*. I had not had one word, or seen one look or sign that even remotely suggested such a thing. I *did* love her. I told myself at this moment that I did, and that it would last as long as I did.

But until she would account for the time which had elapsed between leaving her home and that Christmas Eve when I had found her again, I felt she had no right to ask me if I loved her; for I had not proposed marriage—I had only proposed a necessary ceremony. Unless she could see this for herself and bravely come forward and make the explanation whatever it might be, why could she not be satisfied with what I had already offered? It was surely proof enough of friendship, and I had no reason to suspect that she wanted more.

Still, if she made such terms she must be answered and I honestly felt she ought to be. Had I had less personal feeling and been more disinterested I would have had more policy in dealing with her; but for the moment personal feeling overrode my memory that my mission to-night should have been *success* in my undertaking.

Naturally it was a moment or two before I could frame an answer.

"Signorina, of course I love you. I told you so again and again in Cattaro and I am not a man to change or forget. But I cannot tell you so in the

right spirit now. There is too much between us; and as you said to me once, something inside of me will not let me say it to-night."

She still looked down, her head a little lower yet, and I could not see her face.

"What is between us, Signor?"

Why, oh why, in the name of heaven, *why* would she make me say it! I did not wish to, and she must know what I meant now, and know that Lubitza had told me all. I did not wish to hear a lie—and—to-night—not the truth.

"What is the use, Signorina? Why not let that go for now? We do not need to take it up?"

"Tell me, Signor."

She spoke quietly but with her head still down. I *did* hate to say it, although she must know now what was coming.

"Well, Signorina, since you insist, I will say it. But I did not mean to, and wish you would not make it necessary—very well. Signorina, I am now as I was in Cattaro, and it will never be otherwise with me. But I can no longer tell you of my love until I am told how you came to leave your home; and why; and what you did between then and last Christmas Eve."

She did not raise her head, nor did she answer.

"Signorina, I have not convicted you without first hearing you. I have kept in mind past misunderstandings and I have gone slow. But I must have your own word about it before I can talk of love again. Your word will be good, but I must have that much. But do as you please about giving me a statement. If you decide to keep silent, my friendship and my efforts in your behalf will be no whit abated, neither now, nor in times to come."

There was still no answer. I could not say that she had heard me.

"Gisela, I think I could forgive—anything—with a little time—anything whatever!"

It was the last thing I could think of, to say. To have charged her openly, with having left her home for the Ingenieur and having at least accepted his shelter would have been the next and last step, and this I could not take. Besides it was not necessary. No, I had said enough. The matter was in her hands, now.

"Have you talked with my cousin about this matter, Signor?"

"Certainly, Gisela. There was no other way for me to learn of it."

She asked no further question. Her head remained down for some time longer; but at last she raised it, and with a sight of her face, my hopes sank. She wore the mask again.

For a moment she inspected me and I could no more read her thoughts than if she had been some sculptured thing. The blood of Albina had risen to the surface once more.

"And so, you will not talk of love, but you offer me a marriage to save my estate with the understanding that we part as soon as that object is gained?"

"For now, Gisela, that is the offer. I beg you to see the wisdom of it. For the rest"——

"But, Signor, the will gives me the estate without a marriage if I live rightly. I assume then, since you offer me marriage to save it, that you believe I need this last resort?"

"I will believe your word, Gisela! You have only to tell me what happened in this time."

"I cannot tell you what happened during those months."

I had expected the answer.

"Very well, Gisela, let it be a closed book. But even if you have lived rightly it will be safest and best to adopt my plan. My friend Harry has hinted that your enemies may even use against you the fact of your having come to live in this house where I am. Remember that those people do not care if they use a lie, even knowing it to be such. God knows I acted for the best as I saw it, in bringing you here. Let us do this thing. Why wait for danger when you can be freed in such a simple and easy way? Let me see to the matter to-morrow, and you can leave Vienna the next day."

She rose, came to me and took my hand, still wearing the mask.

"Signor, you have given all the proof of friendship that any one could ask—a friendship that comes to but few. I appreciate it. The sincerity and nobility of your offer will never be forgotten! If I feel that I cannot accept it, never forget that I understood and valued it, as I value you yourself."

"But *accept* it, Gisela! You have too much to lose and your enemies are too strong to play with!"

"I will think the matter over, Signor. That is the most I can say now. In due time you will know my answer. Now will you be offended if I ask you to leave me for to-night? I have much to think over. *Do* not be offended, Herr Doktor! I do not ask you to go because I do not wish to have you with me, but because—I—I—have much—to think over. You—have shown—me my—danger, and I must—have time—have time—to think."

"Don't think too much or too long about it,

Gisela! Act; and do the thinking afterwards. There is nothing much to debate in the affair—only the question if you are willing to accept my help. And if you could only know how welcome to you it is—how anxious I am to give it, you would not worry about the detail. And better sooner than later! Every day is a risk, and the step can only bring you good. I shall hope for your answer sometime to-morrow—and hope that you will decide wisely and favorably."

"I shall do my best to decide wisely, Signor. Good night, dear friend."

"Good night, Gisela."

CHAPTER X

BUT I did not receive her answer the next day. When I called the following afternoon she was out, and in the evening Cecilie informed me that Gisela was not feeling well and begged to be excused. Gisela would let me know when she could see me. There was, thus, nothing to do but to await her convenience.

Then two more days passed and coming home one afternoon between five and six I found Harry awaiting me. He had a box for the opera and had come to take us all. I started to dress and Harry betook himself upstairs.

I was about half dressed when the door-bell rang and my servant came in with the word that a nurse was awaiting me in my study. She proved to be one of the staff nurses of our clinic and had come with the message that an emergency case of great interest to the Hofrath himself had been brought in. Such a message from the Professor was the equivalent of a command; and after again changing my clothes and having sent my servant upstairs with the explanation, I hurried to the hospital.

The case occupied our time until near four and when we were again at liberty I went to one of the bedrooms reserved for the night men and slept until the hour for the Professor's clinical lecture to the university students, which was half past twelve. After having luncheon in the physicians' hall I was occupied all the rest of the afternoon with that bugbear of hospital staff-men: namely, the leafing



over of old, ill-written tomes of the hospital clinical record from many years back, hunting out and tabulating cases parallel with the one of the previous night, in order to deduce the hospital statistics thereon.

Thus it was just twenty-four hours after last leaving my rooms, when, very tired and ill-humored, I saw them again.

The hausmeister came out into the corridor as I was about to unlock my own door. He was pale and worried.

"Herr Doktor, the young lady has gone."

"What young lady?" I snapped.

"The Fräulein Portulan."

"*Gone!* When?"

"Last night about half past ten. She came down to my door and ordered her trunks down at once. There was nothing to do but to obey. I put them on a fiaker which was waiting, and she got in and left."

"Last night! And you have waited until now, nearly twenty-four hours afterwards, to get this news to me!"

"Herr Doktor, I did my best. My wife went to the hospital at once but they said you were busy and to see you was out of the question. She waited there until two o'clock, Herr Doktor. I went over this morning but they said you had been up all night and that the Hofrath had given orders that none of the night-men were to be called for any reason."

"Why did you not insist?"

"I did. I told them it was urgent. They asked me why, and I did not think I could tell them, Herr Doktor. Then they ordered me to leave. This afternoon I kept thinking you would be in every

minute and I have watched for you here. So much time had passed that I thought best to make sure of you here."

"Did she go alone?"

"Yes, Herr Doktor."

"Did you take the number of the fiaker?"

"Yes, indeed, and wrote it down. Here it is; number fourteen hundred eighty-nine. And the destination the Fräulein gave was the West Station."

Hoping to find a note of explanation I hurried into my apartment. I found no note on my desk and my servant assured me that none had been left, but that the hausmeister and his wife had repeatedly inquired for me and that morning Harry and Cecilie had both been there.

I flew upstairs not waiting for the lift and rang Cecilie's bell. She answered in person but it was a moment before she recognized me, her face and eyes being swollen with much weeping. As I started to question her Harry came out of her study and dragged us both inside.

"At least nothing before the maidservant!"

He scowled at me.

"Where is she?"

"Where is she! You ask *me* that! I have just this moment heard it, you idiot! Do *you* speak first!"

"Well, well, Ed, we can do nothing by flying into a passion. I have been trying to comfort Cecilie with the idea that something must have happened which made it necessary for her to go, and that you would probably know what it was, and know of her going. Your own absence made me think of that."

"That was a brilliant idea! I have not been out-

side of the hospital since I left last night; and I would be *so very likely* to take her away without letting her friend know, now, wouldn't I! How did it happen that she didn't go with you last night?"

"Let us speak in German, Ed. Cecilie has a right to know every single word we are saying. She said she had a headache."

"Did she leave no note, Cecilie?"

"I have—found—nothing."

"Let us search; all of us!"

We went to Gisela's sleeping-room and turned over everything there, even the rugs, without result. She had left a few things of no importance in her wardrobes, together with such of her wearing apparel as had not been laundered. She had taken the two trunks which had stood in the sleeping room, leaving behind those in the loft.

"She has waited for a chance to evade us all, and that having come, she has taken what she could," remarked Harry.

"I shall start the police at once!" and I started to go.

Harry seized my arm.

"For what? To stop a grown free woman who has left the house of her own will? They will laugh at you."

His words brought me up, standing. Of her own free will! Certainly it had been so. She had, as Harry had said, waited for her chance and gone secretly and alone. Of course that had been of her own free will. What could the police have to do with that?

"We can at least trace her."

"I have been to the West Station," he replied. "I found the porter who handled her trunks. They

were marked for Munich. He remembered the check number also. Here it is. If you think best to follow her you will have to go there. But I wouldn't do it unless you have better reason than I know."

I had less reason than he knew, but that did not deter me. I barely caught the night train. I waited up until we left Salzburg and questioned the customs inspector at the German frontier, who remembered her.

The following day was spent in an utterly fruitless quest. At the station I learned from the baggage record that the trunks had been put off at Munich, but they had been removed, probably by a porter and no one could tell me whether they had been taken into the city or rechecked by another train. Inquiry among porters and cab drivers was unavailing. No one remembered her or if he did, would tell me. The previous morning had been a crowded and busy one and many travellers and much baggage had passed through the station.

I spent one more day in the city without result and then took the night train back carrying with me no crumb of comfort except a solemn promise from the Chief of Police at Munich that he would communicate by telegraph with me in case he received any news of her.

When I arrived at Vienna again, I visited a detective agency and employed a competent man to make me a weekly report for a while on the movements of Lubitza, the Ingenieur and Baron Ascher. He was not to spy upon them in matters which did not concern me, but I was to know where they all were, and to know of any departures. He made his first report in two days. Lubitza was in Vienna at her duties in the opera. Ascher was at



home engaged in his usual pursuits, chiefly gaming at the club. The Ingenieur had been in Vienna but had gone south to Trieste on the previous day, so was probably on the way to rejoin his post at Trebinje.

She thus must have departed alone, of her own free will. I could see nothing I could do but to make a few secret gulps of nothing in the privacy of my own rooms, and get back into harness.

CHAPTER XI

THE days came and went and after a month I discharged the detective, as he was reporting nothing new. Harry's two concerts came off with the same brilliant success as before. Lubitza was present at both concerts giving him the same rapt attention she had before but did not seek him out at the close of either evening. I took care to take places in the balcony where I knew she would not be near me. I do not think Harry ever spoke with Lubitza again; if he did he never told me of it.

For awhile I called upon Cecilie every day or two, but after a couple of weeks her behavior became peculiar. She was not exactly cold and never discourteous, but, for one thing, she suddenly became disinclined to talk of Gisela. When I would speak of her Cecilie would look at me oddly with her great eyes and answer in monosyllables. It was difficult to see her and not talk of our mutual friend, so my calls became farther and farther apart and after a time I saw her, to greet her, only by an occasional chance in the corridor. At last her leaving time came, and she bade me good-bye, not without cordiality, but with the same half-wondering half-compassionate eyes.

Harry had left long since to fill other concert engagements, and I was left to gray days and memories; for this time no hard work, late hours nor delving over books would deliver me even for an hour from bitterness, forebodings and a biting conscience. In going over the immediate past, as I did only too often, it had occurred to me more than



once that Gisela might have accepted my proposal if I had only said in the right way, the one little thing she wanted to hear.

It was about this time that we in Vienna began to hear more than the usual annual rumors of trouble in the Balkans. The vast mobilization of the army which occurred when Austria technically broke the treaty of Berlin and boldly annexed Bosnia and the Herzegovina did not take place until the following autumn; but at this time news began, little by little, to pass from the lips of one man to another,—unbelieved, scoffed at, laughed at, but none the less persistently. The coming mobilization was considered by most to be the official answer to the recent augmentation of Pan-Servianism which was supposed to have taken place in that part of the Balkans occupied by Austria, and which was believed to have Russian countenance, the latter enlisting in the cause many who otherwise would have had small interest in the movement. Now it was being said that the government would put a stop to the Slavic movement in the lower provinces at the cost of war if necessary; furthermore that the government had unearthed a secret dispatch route in the south of Dalmatia which connected with Montenegro and the lower Austrian provinces, and had now under arrest, a dozen or more persons suspected of connection therewith. It was said that what caused the government especial uneasiness was the fact that a railway through the Novi Pazar had been quietly financed by a wealthy group of Pan-Servianists, its object being to give Servia an outlet to the sea, and that this party wanted war, among other reasons in order to free the Novi Pazar from Austrian domination.

* * * *

The fifteenth of June came, and with it, the conclusion of my four years' work in Vienna, for I was to move to Berlin after the summer vacation. I had resigned from the clinic and given notice that I would vacate my apartment. I meant to spend two weeks in seeing in freedom a little of the old city and in parting with the friends I had had time to make during the long sojourn.

It was my plan to use this summer in one last attempt in Gisela's interest. The date of her majority was, now, only two days away. I had not forgotten it, but I attached little importance to the day itself now, because I conceived that her legal status, whatever it be, was settled by now, and that the decision only remained. This I supposed would be given in the course of a formal legal proceeding at least, and possibly of a lengthy lawsuit, in which all the parties in interest would have due notice and a hearing. Thus Gisela had a battle in court before her, and I determined that the support and needed funds for this should be available if necessary at my own expense. In short, after saying goodbye to Vienna I meant to employ the attorney I had consulted, go to Cattaro if necessary and pick up the threads of the affair there, and devote myself to winning for her if I could, and if not, at least to win her.

One drizzling night about ten days after I had left the clinic I was returning home late, and as I rounded the corner into my street I felt a hand on my arm. The corner was in shadow and thinking her a poor girl of the streets, I was passing on without words when I heard my name pronounced.

"Signor Ransome!"

The tone was low but it stopped me short. I peered at her under my umbrella in unbelief.



"Gisela! Is it you?"

"Yes, Signor, alas! Did you not get my telegram?"

"Telegram? No!"

"I sent one asking you to meet me at the station. You were not there, and I came to your house. There was no light in your rooms and I could not bring myself to ring for the hausmeister, so I have been waiting in the hope you were out and that I would see you come home."

"Poor dear child! How long have you waited?"

"About two hours, Signor."

I felt her skirt. It was soaked.

"You have no place to go, then?"

"No, Signor. I hoped you would arrange that."

"You must go to a hotel to-night, Gisela, and I'll arrange for you the first thing in the morning. I don't know if your old landlady has any rooms free. Did the cab bring you to our door?"

"No, I dismissed him at this corner. My trunks had not come and I have only my satchel which is in a window over there. Signor—there is a reason why I do not wish to go to a hotel. Let me have your rooms to-night."

"Hum. Of course I could give them up to you, but my servant will know you are there. I fear that will not do, my child."

"It does not matter, Signor."

But it did matter. I decided to call up the landlady and if she had no room free, she could give Gisela her own and take mine for the night. Gisela agreed to this.

As we entered the house I explained to the hausmeister that the Signorina had arrived unexpectedly. He concealed his surprise.

"There is a telegram in your letter box, Herr Doktor. It came at half past six."

I took it out and read it.

"Yes, here is your telegram, Signorina."

I asked the hausmeister to leave the lights on until I came down again. As we started upstairs I glanced at her. She was wearing the mask but seemed to be in a high state of nervous tension.

"You are tired, Gisela, but a good night's rest will put you to rights. Now don't run away from me again! I'll come up in the morning at eleven for I must have a talk with you as soon as possible. Don't run away from me again—ever again—will you, Gisela?"

"No, Signor, I won't run away again. It does not matter now. Nothing matters any more. But come to-morrow afternoon. In the morning I must get my trunks"——

"I'll do that for you. Give me your baggage receipt and keys."

She objected to this, saying there were reasons why she would rather get them herself. After ringing five minutes a sleepy and disheveled maid came to the door.

"Call the Gnädige Frau, Rosa."

The good landlady came after some moments, blinking from her first sleep. She looked at Gisela.

"Dete moje!" she screamed, and in an instant they were in each other's arms.

The following afternoon I found Gisela installed in her former rooms, her landlady having arranged this that morning as a pleasant surprise for her when she returned with her trunks. Gisela seemed glad to see me—more so than usual, but seemed preoccupied, and wore ever the mask. I suppose I should explain more clearly what this mask was.

Such an explanation must necessarily be incomplete, because there were elements therein which I could not read at all; else it had been no mask. But in the main it was that impassive, lay-like countenance which sometimes comes to people who have had continuous disappointments, and who come, after awhile, to take disappointments as a matter of course;—a face which is like a stone smoothened by constant attrition against other stones. But that was not all. Hers was also the face which comes to those who have great fixity of purpose and from whom disappointments and irrelative considerations fall away as water from the stone. More of the mask I could not read; and this much only uncertainly.

And I must explain still further that this mask was not all that disturbed me. As one sees the moving eyes of the person deep behind the eye-holes in the mask, so behind that of Gisela I was aware of a certain condition of mind which I can but describe by the word *elevation;* the same elevation which is seen in the earnest Christian, when, having suffered some great misfortune, he thanks God for having selected him (the unfortunate one) for an example upon which to display His power; the elevation of the martyr, in short.

On my side, I had determined to forget the past, and to win and marry her. I fondly told myself that I was under no self-deceit. But I reasoned that if a young girl fall under such special temptations and disadvantages as Gisela had been under, the question for her later lover is not "has she sinned?" but "has she been *spoiled?*" Usually a young girl *is* spoiled in such a case; for her ideals are her life, and these once destroyed, she becomes forever afterward an autumn leaf at the list of

every wind that blows; or, if she have a will and some masculinity, she becomes a deliberate disciple of selfish pleasure and scheming self-interest.

But I was seeing Gisela with another mind now, and I could not look upon her as spoiled. Honor, for example, she had in plenty. It was shown in her imperious refusal to take refuge in a lie when I had indirectly demanded an accounting of her time between leaving home and Christmas Eve. Unselfishness; she had refused a mere marriage of convenience, although so suited to her every purpose. She still had her ideals; she would have no marriage without love—at least on my side. A woman who has preserved these three things is not spoiled.

I told myself that I had left but one question to ask her, and that was if she thought it possible that, now at least, she could love me better than she had, or could, any other man, and I determined to open wide that gate this very afternoon.

"Signor, you have been examining me critically for long enough to read ten such poor books. I am not worth it."

"Not *worth* it! Gisela that is the first falsehood I ever have heard you utter! If you on your side had read my mind you would find little reason to complain of me."

"I never have had cause to complain of you, Signor! You have"——

"You have had plenty of reason, dear child! But, while I do not altogether understand you yet, still I know you better than I did. I know you well enough now that I am going, from now on, to keep you always with me, if I can. I love you, Gisela. I have, since I first saw you three years ago. Marry me and let me have you always by me!"

For a moment the mask was off and a look of pain came over her face. But as I was about to rise and go to her, her old expression returned, as it seemed, by a positive act of will. She put up both hands as if to ward me off, and I sank back into my chair. She was silent some moments and outwardly calm, except for the clasping and unclasping of her hands. Her head was high but she would not look at me.

"Gisela, are you still angry with me?"

"I have never really been angry with you, Signor. You do not understand."

"Then disappointed in me."

"Nor am I disappointed. On the contrary I have honored you more and more every day since I have come really to know you. I have had every reason to do so. Why, Signor, except Cecilie, you are the one true friend I have ever had! And you have been true; true as gold! True from first to last and all of the time! I know that, now, Eduard."

"Then it is simply that you do not love me."

"You are wrong again, Eduard. It is precisely because I *do* love you, that I will not marry you."

"I confess I cannot understand that reason. If you love me, it should be very simple!"

"No. You do not understand, and I cannot help you. Perhaps the day may come when you will understand. But I cannot explain it to you now."

"Gisela, I will speak plainly. I know most that has occurred. I shall never ask you a question about your life the last three years. Let all that pass and be forgotten. Just come to me, dear, and let me love you for the rest of the years we may have together."

"Eduard, *I can not!* I—I—*do* not—press it! I can not—tell you more—but—it can not be!"

"Do you love me?"

"*Yes, yes,* Eduard. God knows I do! I have loved you from the beginning! Always—always! —But that does not help me now, dear. Eduard, I— *Don't* talk of it more, dear!"

The mask was off now. Her face was agonized, and the tears came. But she gulped and controlled herself. She dried her eyes and gazed at me steadily for a moment, then rose from her chair.

"*One* moment—one little moment I *will* have!" she muttered, half to herself.

She came up to me.

"Come dear,—one little moment—one dear, sweet moment, I *will* have!"

Her arms went about my neck and she held me so convulsively, that woman as she was, I had to make an effort to take breath. The moment was very sweet, but it was only a moment. Our lips met but once, and then she tried to push me away. I would not let her go.

"Loose me, dear!"—and her head went down. I kissed the pretty head again and again but did not obey. Then for a moment she made no further resistance. Suddenly and with unexpected strength she tore herself loose at the penalty of flying combs and the falling round about her shoulders of her wealth of beautiful hair.

She smiled a very little as she stood off and rapidly put it up again.

"I am sorry you should see me in such dishevelment, Signor."

"Truly the glory of womanhood is her hair when it is like yours!"

"There are some white threads in it."

"They must be very lonely in that black cloud! I would like to take them to my heart!"

"They would find no blackness there. No, *please* take your chair, dear. My word for it, I'll never risk you again! But I shall have this much to remember, at least."

"Oh Gisela, Gisela, *what* can I say! Help me to find you, child! I have tried to say everything I could, but I am dull. You are right!—I do not understand. But, Gisela, dear Gisela, if loving you very truly, thinking of nothing else in the world but you and you alone—a love that has had its trial of nearly three years of separation—if this deserves anything, dear, I deserve to succeed. Let understanding go to the—winds! Don't debate and think about it more if you love me as you say! People who get into the habit of thinking and thinking get after awhile so they can decide on nothing at all! You say you love me; you even say you have loved me from the first. That would be three years, too. There is nothing between us. There can be, could be, nothing between us. If I be dull, I have at least outgrown the foolishness of expecting too much of a mere human being like myself. Let the past be forgotten. I had only one question to ask you this afternoon. That was if you could now love me better than you ever have or could love, any other man. That question is already answered. What more is there? You know I love *you*, don't you dear? Are you in any doubt about that?"

"No, Eduard. I have no doubts of you now."

She had gone to the window and was looking out and had her back to me.

"Then what more is there, Gisela?"

She remained at the window a long time in silence. I saw her handkerchief go to her eyes once, but afterwards she had straightened up and

I saw that the hand which grasped the window-sill was white with tension.

"I can not—bear this—longer, Eduard! Do you wish me to—run—away again—dear?"

"God forbid! I am silent, Gisela!"

For some moments longer she remained at the window and I watched her in silence. When at last she turned to resume her chair, the mask was on once more, and she was as she had been in the beginning of our interview. Thenceforth her speech was dignified and without emotion.

"If I have allowed this to go so far it was from no lack of determination. I love you and know well that you love me. I have known that you were true ever since shortly after you brought Cecilie and me here. She had told me all, including your support of me, Signor. I understand what you mean by suggesting a burying of the past. There is no past to bury, dear. I can not tell you of those months which have puzzled you—but I did nothing I would be ashamed to have you know. But I can not discuss this with you. Any way, that has nothing to do with my resolve never to marry;—for that is it, dear. It is not that I will not marry you; I shall never marry at all, Eduard."

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips, and then folded her hands in her lap and kept her eyes upon them.

"I can not tell you why I have decided never to marry. It is for a reason you do not guess. You will know what it is some day, but I can not tell you now. And now, dear Eduard, let us dismiss this subject and talk of something else. No, do not go; only, let us talk of other things, dear."

I did not feel that I did, or could give her up. Her words were final enough, but the knowledge



that she loved me was now settled, and in the face of that I could not feel that I would have to give her up. But it was clear that I would have to wait. Well, if that were all, I could wait.

"May we talk of Cecilie, Gisela?"

"Of a surety! Is she not my other—even if lesser—friend?"

"You say she told you that I helped in your support. That was a black and summary violation of a solemn sworn treaty!"

Gisela laughed a little.

"Did you think me so dull? Where should Cecilie find the money for us to live as we were doing after we came here? I taxed her with it, and she couldn't tell me an untruth. I did not know it for a time and was puzzled—only after we came here and lived so much better and I found you and Cecilie acquainted did I guess."

"Did finding that out cause you to run away?"

"Oh, no, Signor, that was for quite another reason. I always planned to pay you back. Alas!"

"Pshaw! Do you know where Cecilie is now?"

"Oh, yes. She is in Berlin. She was engaged by the opera management. I was so glad—it was one bright spot in a very black time!"

"It is good news indeed! But have you been long in correspondence with her?"

"We never broke off correspondence."

"Oh the close mouthed Cecilie! She knew where you were, all of the time? Well! *Now* I have a good deal to forgive her! She knew how I felt—how could she see it and never give me one little word! She practicaly cut me for weeks before she left. Did she know beforehand that you were going to run away?"

"Oh, no, Signor—I wrote her after I had gone.

She wrote me that she was avoiding you—she wrote that she couldn't bear to look at you, and was afraid she would have to tell you. She made love to me for you in every letter she wrote."

"God bless, Cecilie! I'll never forget that!"

"Yes, she is a true friend of both of us. I hoped your friend would like her."

"Harry is a queer fellow. As boys I never knew him to make up to a girl, nor has he shown any tendency that way since I ran across him again. He appears to have wedded his art."

"He seemed to like my cousin when we were in Cattaro."

"Yes, and afterwards here in Vienna. But it was her art that attracted him. I am perfectly certain that as a woman she attracted him not at all. As far as I know they did not meet when he gave his concerts here last March, although I saw her in the front chairs both evenings."

"So much the better for him. I should be sorry to hear that she had the least influence over him. It would not be for his good."

After a moment.

"She now stands in my place, Signor."

"How so?"

"She has my patrimony"

"*Has* it!"

"Yes, Signor."

"Why, Gisela! How can that be? Of course I know that the day of your majority is past but the final settling will have to be by court. Did you not know that? They must give you a formal hearing in court before they can take your patrimony away from you, Gisela! Do you understand what I mean? You must have a notification—a summons from the court—and must go into court and be



questioned there. Without that they cannot touch a heller of your estate. Did you have such a summons?"

"Oh yes, dear," she answered wearily. "I was cited to appear, but I did not go. They decided it on the next day after I came of age. I had had notice long before."

"You did not go!"

"No, Eduard. It had in reality been settled weeks before."

"Why, *Gisela!* I can not help but believe you have been deceived and tricked somehow! I was planning to help you in this, and to carry on the lawsuit for you; because I knew you did not have the money to fight them. Tell me all about it. If they have deceived you in any way we can reopen the case. That much is certain!"

"No, Eduard, we can not reopen it. As I tell you, it was settled weeks beforehand. They claimed the estate under the terms of the will, and I was so situated that I did not dare make any defence. Therefore I let them take it. I now have only Le Tre Sorelle."

That this communication led me into the veriest quagmire of mystification, need hardly be stated here. Awhile before she had told me she had done nothing she would be ashamed to have me know. Now she told me she had lost under the terms of the will and because she did not dare make a defence. She saw my helplessness, and understood it.

"Eduard, dear, I repeat I have lived above reproach; absolutely. I *must* tell you that much. Still, I did not dare to make a defence. The reason I did not dare is, like my reason for never marrying, one I can not explain. But the reason was

real. There was no playing with my intelligence. I knew what they needed to do before they could take my patrimony, and I knew you could and would help me fight them. I intended to ask it of you, because I knew I would be welcome to the help from you. But this reason came up and absolutely tied me hand and foot. I can explain no further, dear."

"And does the reason still hold?"

"A sequence of it does—quite as much as ever—even more."

I refused to believe it, and urged her to let me reopen the case. I explained the views of the attorney; explained the possibility of recovering the estate. I assured her that the funds for the fight should be forthcoming. She only answered that she understood this all, but there was no use. She had lost finally because she did not dare fight them, and finally begged me to say no more of the matter.

"Well, one more thing at least and I have done. Did the entering of the sanctuary of the Greek Cathedral at Cattaro have anything to do with this?"

"Oh, no, Signor. I was terribly frightened that day but the reason for losing my patrimony was far far graver than that."

"And you can not tell me what it was? Remember, I only ask to know in order to put my man's better experience at your service, Gisela."

"No, Signor. And nothing can be done. Do not worry about it longer."

"Any time you will change your mind let me know, dear."

"I'll not change. Nothing can be done, dear friend."



I considered.

"What are you going to do? Stay in Vienna?"

"For a few days. Perhaps longer."

"Have you funds?"

"Enough for the present, Signor."

"But that is no future. Better marry me, dear. I am the one to come to—the one who loves you and wants you. I am about to leave Vienna and next year I will be in Berlin. You can see Cecilie there. Marry me dear. If you forbid me again I'll say no more for at least a month, but I shall keep on hoping. But I ask it once more at least. I love you, dear. Marry me and you shall have no more cares. I'll see to that!"

"Once more, Eduard, I can not. You will know why in due time."

"Once more Gisela, if you love me, there is nothing between us."

"I understand. I love you, and love you no less for the way you have spoken to-day. I will be plain, so you will know that I understood you. Believing me to have fallen, you are still willing to take me. You see, I understand. But *you* do not understand, dear, and, once more, I can not help you. Once more and finally, dear, dear Eduard, I can never marry—never at all."

She reached for my hand and wrung it but would not draw nearer to me.

"I do not and cannot take this as final. Since you will not marry me now I can wait, and remember—I shall wait. Just as long as I must. You say I shall know your reason some day. Very well. If I must, I shall wait until I know your reason. When I then ask you I shall hope for a different answer, Gisela. For the present, then, I will say no more. But remember—I do not give you up."

"It is folly, dear. The day will come when you will be glad I answered so. Now no more—if you love me, Eduard."

But I refused to be down-hearted. I was sure I would not be glad and that I would ask her again at some later day with more success. Of course I couldn't be depressed. She loved me, and had from the first. She had said so and I was certain she had, or she would never have told me so. In that knowledge I could wait a little while—or even a long while.

"I have another piece of news for you, Signor."

"Indeed, Gisela? What is it?"

"My cousin and the Ingenieur are to be married on the thirtieth."

"Ah. Well, that is no surprise—though when I called she told me that the matter was off."

"Not for long"—her face exhibited a passing sneer.

"Where are they to be married?"

"Here in Vienna. My cousin wished it, it seems. They are all coming up from Cattaro—except my aunt."

"How did you learn of it?"

"I correspond with Amalia Sbutega—the daughter of the banker, you know. She wrote me about it."

"The Ingenieur has lost no time," I muttered.

"No. He has only waited until she was sure of the property."

"I wonder Lubitza would take him under the circumstances."

"Oh, one man more or less does not matter to my cousin."

There was no especial bitterness in the remark.

It was uttered as a mere statement of fact; and such it was.

"Signor, I have a favor to ask of you."

"At last!—I am glad to hear that. It is yours! What is it?"

"I have a wish to witness the ceremony. Will you take me?"

I stared. Of all unexpected incidents in my life this capped the climax! She wished to witness the wedding between the Ingenieur and her cousin! The wedding of the cousin she had hated all her life, and the Ingenieur whom she professed so to despise! Why was this?

It was the first thing she had ever said or done to rouse a spark of jealousy in me;—but this did—plenty of it.

Was she befooling me, after all? Why? She did not wish to marry me nor did she desire favors of any account, and still again she was not the type that lies and deceives on principle. No, that was not it. But was it—could it—be possible, that she loved *both* of us? Each in a different way, perhaps?

After all, I must always face the fact that she had run away from home to join him. I might believe her words that she had kept herself actually clean; and I might otherwise gloss over, minimize and veil this event, but it remained a *fact*—and carried its own atmosphere with it.

After all, by what law of Nature are we to love but once? That is not Nature's law at all, but an artificial—a human made notion, rooted in the selfish jealousy of the mate. And if by Nature's law we may love more than once, why not more than once at the same time? And honestly—and cleanly, too? Love is not a simple affair of one strand—

it is a complex and very tangled skein which entwines several widely different sides of our natures. Must all of its threads proceed to one and the same object? One and the same person? Every one who has eyes that *will* see and ears that *will* hear, knows that this is not even the rule;—even among the best of people. We do not have to yield to it; but that heritage from Nature, the tendency to have more foci than one, has never yet been rooted out.

So, as I thought, the light broke. Gisela loved us both. That cleared up everything that was dark;—why, although she had loved me, she had gone to join him when I was no longer by; why she would not marry me—I had her *respect* and her best in general, and she would not come to me with another love on her conscience; why she would never marry at all—the Ingenieur was to marry her cousin; and not respecting him, perhaps she would not have taken him, either. Why she would not tell me the reason, and why she was so sure that if ever I learned it, I would say she was right. Yes, I "understood" at last!

"Is it so much to ask, Signor, that you must consider it so long?"

"No, Gisela," I answered, sadly enough. "So far as I am concerned, it is a very little favor indeed."

"Why, then, the debate?"

"Is it best, Gisela? Would it not be a very great intrusion? I am not expecting cards from your cousin! Not after our last interview!"

"Oh, we will not go among the guests, and a church is never closed to people because of a wedding. It will be in St. Cecilia's Church."

"St. Cecilia's Church! Why, that is Roman Catholic! I thought"—

"I forgot to tell you, Signor, that all my people except Paulo have changed to the Roman faith. We had always been Roman up to my father's time, so it is but a return to former things. As for the Ingenieur, he has always been Roman—as far as he is anything—and the selection of the church was, no doubt, his. I don't know why they chose that particular church."

"So their wedding will be in St. Cecilia's Church. Well?"

"Yes. They will come in at the main entrance, of course. We can go in at the side door in the rear. I have been there and know the church. We can remain in shadow in the corner at the rear entrance until the ceremony begins than we can walk a little forward along the columns. Thus we can see without their seeing us."

I hesitated, but after all what harm could there be in it? They would not see us, nor even know that we had been there. Besides, as always in a church, there would be other uninvited onlookers.

"Very, well, Gisela. I'll go and see the verger and arrange for it."

"No! No! Eduard. He might speak of it, and I wouldn't have my cousin know I went for all Vienna! No, let us just quietly go at the hour appointed. If we can not walk in we can give it up—but don't mention it to anybody—will you, Eduard?"

It was not to be wondered at that she did not wish to risk Lubitza hearing of it. I agreed to go, as she wished; and as Gisela seemed tired I very shortly took my departure—not in the good spirits and hopeful mood with which I had come and which had remained with me until our last few words.

CHAPTER XII

THE morning of the thirtieth dawned in brilliant sunshine and according to arrangements I ordered a fiaker to take Gisela to the church. During our drive there she was very quiet and sat uncompromisingly in her own corner of the carriage and I did not offer to disturb her by word or look. I could not read an iota of her thoughts, nor did I seek to do so, being buried in my own gloomy forebodings as to the future.

We dismissed our fiaker shortly before reaching the cathedral, and walked the remaining distance, arriving about a quarter to twelve. We followed the curve of the apse to a small side door behind the transept and silently entered. On arriving, the the right transept had prevented our seeing the front of the church, but now looking down through the nave we saw that the wedding party had just arrived.

St. Cecilia's is an unusually gloomy cathedral. The great picture windows allowed the play of a kaleidoscope of colors, chiefly reds, upon the floors and columns, accentuating the dark corners and throwing long mysterious shadows across the nave and aisles. The slender but powerful gothic columns rose high above our heads to the mingled light and gloom of the clere-story above, the vaulting of the roof of the aisles looking skeleton-ribbed in the shadows.

As our eyes became accustomed to the relative gloom of the church we saw that a good many people were scattered in groups in the pews, com-

posed largely, as I saw at once, of Lubitza's artist friends, among which I recognized many familiar and well known faces. The side aisle was, however, deserted and there was no one to question our entrance.

The great organ began the wedding march and we moved forward until we were near the front end of the screen which extended between the side aisle and the choir-seats, and here behind a column, we took our stand and waited for the wedding party to come in.

The party entered the front portal. In advance, preceded by two tiny cadets, came the Ingenieur, with Paulo on his arm. He was followed by two army officers, strangers to me. Having arrived at the chancel (sanctuary) gate he awaited his bride.

After some moments Lubitza, on her father's arm, came up the nave. She was preceded by two tiny girls in white and followed by two bridesmaids, one of them an opera singer of international fame, the other an operatic neophyte of whom Lubitza was known to be the generous protectress and benefactress.

Lubitza, always a handsome woman, looked her best to-day. She also looked frankly happy and satisfied as her oblique but fine eyes glanced about over the guests in the pews, all of whom turned backwards with necks craned, to see the bride as she marched up the nave. She was attired in a simply made beautifully fitting travelling dress, and it was evident that the pair was to depart from Vienna that same day.

As she approached the sanctuary gate Gisela and I stood a little closer to our column. Now the pair advanced into the sacred area. The priest advanced to meet them. The organ was stilled and

the ceremony began with the bridal pair kneeling directly in a brilliant patch of rosy light, just in front of the high altar.

So far I had been interested in the event and my attention had wandered from Gisela; but as the actual ceremony began I saw her sink down upon the step which separated this part of the aisle from that farther forward. Thinking her faint or ill I went to her, but she motioned me away. I retired a step or two and watched her. Her back was toward me, but her left hand clutched the choir-screen above her head as she reclined upon the steps and her right hand was pressed against her bosom. The latter visibly rose and fell, and now and then she took a long breath which elevated her shoulders. I could not see her face, but was aware that her gaze, through the space between the first choir-chair and the adjacent column, was riveted upon either Lubitza or the Ingenieur—I could not tell which, but presumed the latter. Her whole pose seemed to indicate complete abandonment to grief and despair. After looking about to see if anyone might be observing her, I forgot the proceeding ceremony and gave myself up to bitter thoughts and feelings among which a cutting jealousy was not wanting, tempered though it was by sincere compassion for her.

Again my theories recurred, with more or less change. If she loved us both, she loved the Ingenieur most and best—that was clear. If I had not had such a rooted belief in her sincerity I would have concluded that she loved him only, but in the face of past events and past words between us I could only believe that her love was divided.

But that she loved the Ingenieur was certain, and now she was watching him pass utterly from her



into union with her hated cousin, and was giving way to emotion in a manner more definite than I had ever seen her do. I could not see her face, but I thought I could guess what was there, and I did not believe this was the mask which she had worn so long.

I wondered just what her real feelings for me could be. It was an idle and thankless speculation. I could make nothing of it, and finally became buried in a maze of sad memories and despairing conjectures which led me from no beginning to no end, and which benumbed my intellect and even every sensation save the leaden one about the throat.

Without object or reason I turned away and paced slowly rearward into the apse of the cathedral. Here before a side chapel a monk was praying. I watched him idly. For the first and only time in my life I wondered if it could be possible this his life was happier than that of us outside. However, he was praying—and praying earnestly with, evidently, great internal emotion. What for? For what boon was he so earnestly entreating the Mother? Forgetfulness? Who but he could tell! Perhaps his life was not more tranquil than that of other men.

The day outside was hot and the church was very cool. I felt chilled. I walked back into the side aisle and saw that Gisela had not changed her position. Glancing through the rear part of the choir-screen I saw that the priest was just pronouncing Lubitza and the Ingenieur, man and wife. At the moment I observed her Lubitza was looking up into the Ingenieur's face with a proud and radiant countenance. I had not up to now believed her capable of such an expression, there seemed so much of the womanly woman, at last, in her face. Was

she still acting? But her happiness was very real—that was certain, and it furnished another problem for speculation in the course of which my mind harked back once more to the mutual ancestress of these two women, and buried itself in problems of heredity. There was nothing in the history of Albina herself, so far as I knew it, which indicated that she had ever loved more than one man at the same time, but these girls were her descendents, showing many of her characters, a fact indicated by more than one ear-mark, and since they both had *this* character, I concluded that it had come down from Albina; and I cursed her memory.

I walked to the side door of the church and out, blinking in the bright sunlight and grateful for the feeling of warmth after the stay in the cool church.

The priest was, now, of course, delivering his homily to the bridal couple—his instructions regarding right and proper living in Christian wedlock. I wondered if he knew of the facts of Lubitza's and the Ingenieur's past lives. Of that of the bride, he must know more or less, as it had been notorious. I would have given something to hear what he was saying to them and to see the faces of all three as it was said. This, however, was not possible for me, and I had to content myself with speculating what the inner feelings of a Catholic clergyman must be, sometimes, as he delivers this lecture to the bridal pair. Surely, sometimes, he must feel a well-defined nausea.

The organ once more rolled out its mighty peal and I hastened back into the church. After my eyesight had once more become adjusted to the relative gloom of the cathedral, I saw that the bridal procession was about to start down the center of the nave.

Gisela had not risen, but was now sitting, bent forward, watching them. I went to her and laid my hand upon her shoulder. She started violently and looked up.

"Gisela, it is over. We would better go now, before some one recognizes us."

She rose, facing me, and took a step backward. Her face was full of expression and her eyes were wider and greater than ever—but the tears I was expecting to see were not there. This was a passing surprise.

She stood like a statue but gazed at me with her face reflecting many emotions. Her hands clenched and unclenched. She seemed to be debating something—some crisis or other—madly.

"Come, Gisela dear, let us go. Someone will see us and tell of our presence here, I am afraid."

Still she stood and gazed at me, without tears, but as if all of her heart were in her eyes. She half raised her arms, took a step toward me and stopped again. She opened her lips as if to speak. Her right hand wandered seemingly idly to her bosom. Then she closed her lips and suddenly seemed to draw herself together. She stood up straighter and seemed actually to gain in height. Her face lost its emotion and became rigid. She advanced up the step which separated us, fell upon her knee, took my hand and, bending her head, kissed it. Then she rose and hurriedly and brokenly addressed me:

"Eduard,—my love,—my only love,—thank you for bringing me today! Thank you for your love —for all you have done for me! I have read and know your thoughts. You have been wrong, dear, dear Eduard,—as you shall soon know now. I have loved you from the first, and shall love you

always,—*always,* until I die. Goodbye, Eduard dear! Goodbye, for now we separate forever! When you think of me hereafter, remember, I could not help giving you up, dear. Goodbye. *I love you,* Eduard—goodbye!"

She wrung my hand and turned and sped down the side aisle toward the front of the church. The bridal procession was now half way down the nave. I saw Gisela disappear in the midst of a little gathering at the church door. Struck dumb by amazement and doubt, I made my way in the direction she had taken, thinking to have a word more with her. A good many of the wedding guests were now crowding hastily out of the pews into the side aisle in order to have a last look at the bridal party, and by the time I reached the front of the church the bridal party had nearly reached the entrance. A group of spectators, invited and uninvited, filled the space on either side of the entrance and the only clear space lay directly in front of the advancing bridal pair.

I did not see Gisela anywhere, so assumed that she had left the church. As I could not go out just then, in advance of the wedding party, and thinking to find Gisela at home later, I waited and turned to look at Lubitza's smiling, happy face.

Suddenly, as I watched it, her face froze into a look of mingled surprise and anger. At this instant the Ingenieur turned to say something to Paulo, who bent forward to listen. Following Lubitza's look, I saw Gisela advancing hurriedly through the clear space to meet her cousin. Lubitza clutched the Ingenieur's arm and her father strode forward from behind, but quicker than they, Gisela's lithe figure reached her cousin. Her hand went to her breast and then was raised above her



head. I saw a tiny glint of bright steel and saw the glint, with the speed of light itself, descend and disappear in Lubitza's breast.

Lubitza flung her hands above her head, but uttered no cry, and her face did not seem to indicate pain. She swayed an instant, and turned her face upward to the crown of the portal of the cathedral. There then came over her face, for just one instant, the most indescribable look of horror and fear I have ever witnessed. Then the light went out of her eyes and face, and she fell heavily in a heap upon the pavement.

At first the entire company stood as if turned to stone. Following this instant was an indescribable confusion, screams and cries, some of the people fleeing through the entrance, others into the aisles, a few crowding up to the scene of the tragedy. The Ingenieur seemed to be the first one to recover himself. He seized Gisela, and in a flash she struck him, also, in the breast, and he reeled backward into Paulo's arms. Then she turned, with her weapon raised, and faced the rest, who fell away from her like chaff before a gale. She stood now, quite alone, and cast her glance toward that part of the church where we had parted, and called out in ringing tones, perfectly audible above the organ:

"I have given my cousin as a wedding present the last of my inheritance which I possessed. Now let it be known, once for all, why I would not marry!"

She flung the stiletto upon the pavement beside Lubitza, dropped her hands to her sides, bent her head, and stood waiting. Now a dozen hands seized her, and now the people from both inside and outside the doors formed a dense gathering about her and her cousin. I saw a well-known sur-

geon elbowing his way through the crowd, the way being opened for him as he was recognized. With some hazy half-mad idea of standing by Gisela, I tried to reach her, but it was impossible. She was being taken out of the church by the military men and I could not even get to the door. At this instant a thought came to me, and after making sure that she was not being handled roughly, I pressed to the back of the crowd again and began to make my way among the fainting and hysterical women and jabbering, excited men up the side aisle toward the rear door.

As I reached the step by the side of the choir I looked back. The surgeon had cast a handkerchief over Lubitza's face and many hands had raised the still figure from the pavement and were bearing it toward the entrance, the organ still rolling out the wedding march.

I saw the priest who had officiated rushing toward the front, and noticed a monk flying into the entrance to the stairway leading to the organ loft; but the great instrument was still sounding as I hurried out of the rear door.

CHAPTER XIII

I NEED not dwell upon my own condition of mind after this terrible event. It was what might have been expected under the circumstances. But mentally benumbed with horror as I was, I had realized quickly that I had work to do and but little time to lose. I concluded that my own arrest must follow in due course, and it flashed upon me that I must use every precious moment in arranging for her protection and defence—and also my own:—for I happened to know that once under arrest, a person seriously accused is not permitted to consult his attorney in private.

I walked away in the direction of a cab-stand, breaking into a headlong run as soon as I was out of sight of the gaping crowd, and inside of a half hour I was again closeted with the consular attorney, Dr. Sommer. At my previous visit he had taken full notes of the case and my additional story did not require much time. He now re-studied these notes, shaking his head repeatedly.

"Of course we have but one line of defence, Herr Doktor," he finally remarked. "Need I tell you what that is?"

"Temporary insanity, of course. Will it go?"

"Impossible to guess now. There is, of course, more or less ground. Her past life and troubles, alone in the world without a protector, as she has been, may well be looked upon as a possible antecedent cause. Then her failure to consider the interests of her best friend (for she has seemingly been utterly careless of involving you, Herr Doktor, and

you may also have trouble) shows abnormal fixity of idea along the line she has acted to the exclusion of ideas ordinarily of moment. Also the spectacular character of the tragedy committed under such utter carlessness of consequences, coupled with a complete absence of any plan for escape, further indicates irresponsibility. Then her previous aberrant moods, her sudden disappearances, the elevated condition of mind and fixity of countenance which you describe, can also be used. But, we must have more proof or color of proof than this. Our first task must be to inquire thoroughly into her private life of recent years, and endeavor to show that this fixity of idea is not a thing of to-day or yesterday, but that it has been under development for a long time. Revenge for the loss of property is not always the manifestation of an unsound mind, and it will be especially dangerous if they can show color or a broken love affair with the husband of the deceased.

In short we must ascertain fully the facts of her private life, especially between the time she left home and the moment of the tragedy. We will use or suppress these according to circumstances; but we must know them."

"Doctor Sommer, if the commission find her insane, will she be tried?"

"No. An insane person cannot be tried, Herr Doktor. She will be remanded to an insane hospital, or a maison de santé."

I writhed in my seat. But it was, of course, better than a prison.

"Would her friends be allowed to take charge of her?"

"It may be possible to arrange it, but it would have to be in some safe institution."



I breathed a little more freely.

"Then, in time, if pronounced cured, she could be released!"

"Possibly—in time."

I looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Doctor Sommer, is money of any use in this program?"

"It is impossible to say yet. Have I carte blanche?"

"Up to two hundred and fifty thousand crowns. It is all I have immediately available. If necessary, I can sign obligations for more and meet them later on."

"I think less will do, Doctor Ransome. More would, I think, be of no avail. With such a fund to draw upon I have some hope that the matter can be managed. Pick up your courage, Doctor! Even if we fail to avoid conviction there still remains the hope of the Royal pardon. You need have no worry about a death penalty, for the Emperor in his old age is commuting all such sentences. Money is, of course, of no use there, but will help us in getting the hearing, for an application for full pardon must go through several hands before it reaches the Royal ear. What is her religion?"

"Roman Catholic, now."

"That will help. We may be able through that fact to inspire interest for your client in some influential quarter."

"Do your best, Doctor Sommer!"

"Rest assured of it! Now a little for yourself, Herr Doktor. Don't talk. If any one in authority question you, refer him to me."

"I am expecting arrest. She was my friend and in my home. And I went with her to the church."

"Oh, they will arrest you. Is there any one to stand for you? We will need you outside."

"Go to Count Weyer-Reinbach."

"Very well."

I left him with some encouragement, but my arrest came at once. When I arrived at my apartments I found the police already in charge of my rooms ransacking everything with my servant standing agape over them. They allowed me time to reengage my apartments, and then I was placed in a carriage and not long afterward I was installed in less commodious and comfortable quarters. Two days later, thanks to Count Weyer's signature, I was released and allowed to return to my rooms, but forbidden to go outside of the octroi boundary lines of the city.

The day after my release Cecilie arrived and we drove directly from the station to attorney Sommer's office.

In response to the lawyer's questions Cecilie stated that she had first met Gisela on the train between Laibach and Graz. Cecilie had been taking a rest in Meran and had come to Laibach with a newly made acquaintance for a two days' visit. When, after this, she had taken the train for Vienna, she and Gisela were alone in the compartment reserved for ladies traveling alone. This was when Gisela first came to Vienna.

Owing to Gisela's evident inexperience in traveling, Cecilie had offered to help her, and thus they became acquainted. As Gisela had no especial place to which to go to in Vienna, Cecilie had recommended rooms she knew to be free, in a house next door to the one in which she would reside and which she had occupied up to leaving for her sojourn in Meran. This was in Anton Frank Street.

A few days later Gisela had moved to rooms in her own house and from that time on they were together until Gisela had suddenly fled the city.

"Did she have money?"

"Only a little."

"Who paid for her rooms?"

Cecilie hesitated.

"We must know all, Fräulein, in order to meet every attack from the other side," said the attorney.

"Ingenieur Overmann."

"Ah-h!"

"But they were not friends!"

"Not friends? Why, then, did he support her?"

"He was trying to get her to agree to marry him. He told her that her uncle was sending him the money to use for her, but told her that her uncle forbade her to write to him. Later when he found that she would not marry him, he told her that it was he himself who was furnishing the money and that he would no longer do so unless she would agree to marry him. Then she ordered him to leave her for good. At first she merely told me she could no longer take the money, but later, after he had tried again several times to see her, she told me just how it was, and all that had gone before."

"Why did she leave her home to begin with?"

"I do not know, Doctor Sommer. That is one of two things she never offered to tell me, and I did not ask."

"What was the other?"

"Why she suddenly left Vienna after we moved to Doctor Ransome's house. Her only reference to this was in one of her letters in which she wrote that she had to leave in order to save some one."

"Save whom?"

"I do not know. She just wrote 'some one.' I have always suspected that this had something to do with Doctor Ransome. He was pressing her to marry him, too, and I know there was some reason why she could not."

"Did she love Doctor Ransome?"

"With all her heart, poor dear! Many a night I have stayed with her until she fairly cried herself to sleep!"

We were all silent at this.

"But you do not know why she could not marry him?"

"No, Doctor Sommer. She only said she did not dare. Whatever the risk was, I think she meant at one time, to take it, but just two days before she went away, she told me she would never marry at all."

"It is a great pity we do not know what that reason was," remarked the lawyer. "I fancy it was, at least, the precipitating cause of the tragedy. If I be permitted to question her privately, I will try to get her to tell me."

He rapidly completed his notes up to this point.

"But after she left Vienna you knew where she was?"

"Yes, after a few days."

"Where was she?"

"In the convent of St. Agatha."

We both started in surprise.

"St. Agatha's, here, near Vienna?"

"Yes, Doctor Sommer. When she had reached Munich, she took a train back the same night. You must have passed her on the way, Doctor Ransome. A sister was waiting when she arrived at the station, and they went together, directly to the convent."



"Did you go to see her there?"

"Twice."

"Did she remain there until she last returned to Vienna?"

"I think she must have. I have a letter from her which was posted from there only three weeks ago yesterday."

"St. Agatha's convent!" muttered the lawyer. "Her Durchlaucht the Fürstin Carlovitz is a special patroness of that institution—Hum—Well Fräulein, can you think of anything to add? For example, did she seem to be herself at all times?"

"Oh, *no*, Doctor Sommer! I have known her to stand for a half hour at a stretch with hands clenched, staring at one spot on the floor. I have seen her stand before a window in her room, in the dark, with both hands raised above her head as if she were making a vow. I have seen her reach for a book on a shelf, and then seem to recollect something, and forget to lower her arm and stand that way for minutes at a time. Much of the time she would slowly pace the floor with a perfectly expressionless face, and she would not hear when I spoke to her. Sometimes she would be so, and then suddenly burst out singing; singing half wildly and with breaks and catches in her voice. She would sometimes sing the same way in her sleep. It always fairly prostrated me to hear it for I know what singing is, and why singing is of this sort or that, and I always know that this singing meant a conflict between her despondency and her will not to show it, even when it was in her sleep. For three or four days before she fled away, it was more so than usual. It was *dreadful* to hear that in the dead of night!"

"The singing?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Did she talk in her sleep?"

"Not that I ever noticed. We slept in adjoining rooms. I only heard singing."

There was not much more, for Cecilie had told all she knew.

She went to a hotel, and after making an appointment to call the day following, I went to my rooms to try if my despondency, self-accusations and remorse would allow me to have a little peace in sleep.

There were other consultations of course, but they were routine affairs that will not interest the reader of this narrative. Nearly a week passed before I received any further definite news.

Then, in response to a note, I called at the attorney's office. He informed me that he had succeeded in enlisting the full sympathy and interest of the Fürstin Carlovitz, the more as Gisela had already once been under the protection of St. Agatha's convent. They had gone together to the convent and talked with the Superior. Furthermore, he told me, the regular committee of medical experts attached to the Court would examine Gisela in a couple of days.

I never knew all that passed at this sitting, for Gisela, myself and witnesses were separately examined in private. A number of persons were called, including two of the nuns at the convent, and Gisela's former and latter landladies. The two well-known alienists who had charge of this examination were the only ones who had had access to Gisela herself. The Ingenieur testimony was taken at his bedside. I was not at this time informed what it was, but learned long afterwards. I will here remark for the reader's benefit, that

for some reason or another, he said everything he could for Gisela.

Their decision was not made public immediately. I was given to understand that it would be final.

The following day I met my attorney by appointment. He had two curious and unexpected questions to ask.

"Doctor, are you prepared to renounce forever all claims to Fräulein Portulan's estate?"

"Why, Doctor Sommer! What claim have *I* upon her estate? That should be done by the Signorina herself!"

"She has already done so. But certain persons exact that you also sign a renouncement. The instrument will recite her present estate, and will not include anything she may acquire later."

"Done, Doctor Sommer."

He had the contract ready. A notary was called in and I signed the document. Then the notary left.

"Now, Doctor Ransome, I have one thing further. Are you prepared to make a gift—a heavy one,—to St. Agatha's convent?"

"If it be within my means."

He mentioned the sum. It *was* a "heavy" gift,—truly. I thought the matter over, for this together with the other drafts that had been made upon me and would still be made, would leave me a poor man. A thought of my friend the banker at Cattaro came to me, but I felt that his obligation had not comprehended help of this kind and to this extent; besides, that had been intended for me, only.

I admit that it cost a struggle, and my hesitation must have been marked; but there rose up before me a face with beautiful, sad Dalmatian eyes, and

the memory that she "had always loved me,—from the beginning! Always,—always!" and, as I now knew, had always been true to me—more true than I had been to her! And with this memory came another; namely, that I had once been in a position to protect her, and had I been as true to her as she had been to me—had I had less temper and more patience—I could have prevented her ever falling into her present plight. I mechanically reached for a pen.

"Will she be set free, Doctor Sommer?"

"Set free! A homicidally dangerous *insane woman?* Not in Austria, Doctor Ransome!"

"Not free!"

"It will be this way, and there is no other way, Herr Doktor. The medical committee will declare her of unsound mind. Then the convent will come forward, state that she wishes to take the veil, and that in consideration of that they offer to assume the care of her for the rest of her life."

"To take the veil!"

"You must never repeat this interview, Doctor Ransome, nor ever make public any fact concerning the matter. Of course, this woman may be insane for aught I know. Your own opinion will be better than mine as to that. But the *proof* of insanity is by no means conclusive. The committee has decided to give her the benefit of the doubt, but they are by no means satisfied. However, so far, all is regular. The irregularity consists in substituting the convent for a maison de Santé in the case of a person, who having the idée fixé, has committed homicide. That seldom occurs in Austria, Herr Doktor. It has been difficult to manage. I have had to enlist the countenance of some import-



ant people. Do you not realize the significance of this arrangement?"

To take the veil! That separated us forever! Had I been in her place I would rather have had a prison sentence but I could not reason that way for her. She could still enjoy God's bright sunlight and wholesome air. Her life would turn grey —but better that than black.

"And if she were to go to a maison de Santé instead?"

"Ask yourself, Herr Doktor! Would she not become mad forever?"

"Have you this contract ready, too?" I asked, pretty hoarsely, I think.

He silently spread the document before me. I looked it over, but my eyes were only faithful enough to gather the general sense of it. It permitted payment in yearly installments for ten years, with an allowance for pre-payments. I signed the contract and pushed it away.

I do not know what else he may have said. I think he misjudged me a little, for I just realized some words about my still being a young man, without burdens, with plenty of time to make another competence. He meant to be kind and he really had done well. He had passed his case along those lines reserved for the very rich and titled classes, and which are closed to ordinary travel. But *he* did not "understand," either. I would have been satisfied to be poor—with Gisela. But to be poor, and have to sign herself away as well, took my very last strength.

My own trial came a week later. As the principal in the tragedy had been declared of unsound mind, it was a short affair. The jury considered

the case for only ten minutes and I was acquitted, the judge dismissing me with a kind speech.

I never asked the banker for help. The most I could have expected from him would have been a few thousand crowns, which would not especially have altered my circumstances. I let the money go and kept my pride.

CHAPTER XIV

CECILIE had remained in Vienna until the close of my own trial. A couple of days afterward I accompanied her to the train, and as she bade me goodbye, she said:

"I saw her yesterday at the convent."

"How does she seem?"

"She is resigned. We did not talk of you much, but she sent you one last message. It was that 'she loved you from the first and would love you always. Her vow could never alter that,' she said."

Cecilie kissed me on both cheeks.

"Love her—always—Edward!" And in a passion of tears she hastened aboard the train. I watched her waving handkerchief until it disappeared from sight.

My own plans, perforce, had altered. In my changed circumstances I could no longer carry out my elaborate plans for further improvement in my profession. I did not feel that I could go to Berlin at all, but decided to remain some months in Vienna where I was known on the clinic and in consequence had certain advantages. At the end of that time I would return home and go into practice, for my dreams of that private hospital had gone up in smoke, along with several other fine plans.

I left Vienna for six weeks, partly to get away from the scene of my troubles and partly to give gaping blockheads who knew me by sight time to get interested in some other sensation and cease

pointing me out whenever I appeared in a public place.

The first day of my return to my rooms, after this absence, was especially bitter, and I never went up stairs again. As time passed, by burying myself in my books, I was able, at times, to think of other things.

There would, however, be times when I would be unable to work. On these days I would take a train out to the outlying village in whose neighborhood the convent was, and find some place where I could watch the distant buildings from outside the extensive walls. Once I called there with the wife of an acquaintance. The Sister Superior received us in the visitors' room, but would not hear of calling Gisela. She informed us Gisela was well, and said that she was a model member of the sisterhood. She faithfully promised to inform me if Gisela should have any serious illness. She furthermore informed me that Gisela was still in the novitiate but would receive the veil in about a fortnight. Finally she forbade me unconditionally to call, ever again.

About this time the war cloud was hanging persistently over Austria, and the following winter saw the beginning of that heavy mobilization of the army. The formal annexation of Bosnia and the Herzegovina had been announced. The war cloud lowered still more, and now almost the entire Austrian army became massed in the south ready to spring upon the small Servian state, and the German army prepared to defend Austria's northern and eastern frontiers against Russia. At this time only the active union of two other great powers was necessary to plunge Europe into a conflict, but

that union never materialized. Instead, one by one, the powers acknowledged the annexation to be a "fait accompli," Pan-Servianism in the Balkans received its check for the time, and little by little the war cloud began to lift and wing heavily away. But there was an aftermath in Austria. This was the notorious trial at Agram.

Determined to strike a death-blow to the Pan-Servian propaganda, the government had been for some months apprehending all the supposed leaders of the movement, together with others more remotely connected with it. There was little proof against these men, and some of them were shown, at the long trial, lasting months, to have been even faithful servants of the Crown. All these men were finally acquitted; but for a year or more their fate and that of many others with them hung in the balance. This trial had not yet taken place at this date of my narrative, but we were beginning to read about it in those trivial niggling articles in which the Continental press alludes to such things, and which make one so think of a man walking through a field of stumps.

The months dragged by and once more the time came for me to let my rooms go, and to pack up my belongings—to go home, this time. Once more my rooms were in disorder, all my trunks being ready except the two I would use on the actual journey.

I was not intending to occupy many hours with good-byes this time, but there was one good-bye I did wish to say, and I felt I could not leave without it. I determined to see Gisela once more before I went. We may talk all we please about any one "being dead to us," but as long as they actually

live, and we know it, they are never dead to us. That can only be when we know they are beneath the ground. Gisela was not dead to me, as the Sister Superior had, not unkindly, told me she must be. Nor would she ever be.

I knew better than to try to see her at the convent—better than to show myself there again. Nor did the chance of seeing her any other place seem bright. So my resolve was based merely upon the intense desire, and upon no plan. However, the Fates had decreed that so much, at least, was to be granted me.

I had spent several idle days obsessed by this idea, when one afternoon I was hailed from a passing carriage. It stopped and Count Weyer alighted and greeted me warmly. He had been away;—in Paris, I had understood, and I had not seen him since shortly after my trial, many months before.

He shook my hand and demanded an account of myself.

"What! Going back *home?* I am sorry to hear that, Doctor. You must call and see us before you go. The Gräfin has always been fond of you. Exactly when are you to start?"

I explained that I was uncertain, but that it would have to be soon.

"Are you still at work?"

"Oh, no. Entirely idle, Count."

"Ah! I see a pretty face in this, Doctor! A man like you is idle for no other reason. Who is *this* one?"

"The same face, Count."

He grew grave.

"Still hit, my friend? That is bad. It will be difficult to get hold of her."

"I never hope to, Count. But I wish I might see

her just once more. That is not much, for it would be the end."

"*May*-be!" he said, drily. "I have heard of such things as escaped nuns. Hum! Let me think. It would be a jolly lark, and I wish I saw a way to help it along. Would she go?"

"Oh, no, Count. You are quite off the mark, I assure you. I am certain she would not go. I could only hope to see her—at most, to exchange a good-bye."

"Rather unsatisfactory. I ought not to sympathize with her! The removal from the world of as fine a sport as the Tomaso was a great shame! And such a voice, too! But never mind. I don't know much about convents, and nuns have never appealed to me—hum—but the Gräfin knows more. I'll talk the matter over with her. Well, Doctor, those horses are fresh and the coachman is cursing because I am keeping him here. Hum,—since you are idle, come along with me now. We will all take dinner together. *Come* along, boy! I'll have no excuses!"

He took me by the arm and dragged me to the carriage. In truth it was a welcome diversion, for my mood had become indigo. The Gräfin was a big, cheery, motherly woman who loved young people better than those of her own age. The Count himself was a gay man and did not care in the least who knew it. The Gräfin was gay also—but legitimately. She loved a love affair of the right sort, and even had a certain sneaking sympathy with some of the ones of the wrong sort, as I had more than once suspected. It was easy to see how she had the best regard of such a man as the Count; she never annoyed him, but kept his respect.

We had about concluded our dinner that evening when the Count broached the subject of our previous conversation.

"Annetta, the mind of our young friend is not with us, but in St. Agatha's. Do you know anything about them there?"

"Why—not very much, I fear. But I think I could break in." Then more seriously. "Do you still love her, Edward?"

The Count answered for me.

"He would like to run away with her. He protests he only wants to say 'good-bye forever,' and so on,—but—I was young once! I know just what that 'good-bye forever' business means!"

"Yes. He said 'good-bye forever' to me six times in one short year. But she has taken the veil now, Edward. You can do nothing now, boy! The Count has a maximum lack of respect for all things for which he should have reverence, but I believe that even *he* would respect the *veil!*"

"Oh, I have always let nuns alone. No shaved-heads for me!"

"Shaved-heads!"

"Well, it comes to the same thing. Why! Did you not know that, Doctor?"

Her beautiful hair removed!

"Bah! It can grow again!" said the Gräfin.

The Count laughed, loud and long.

"Hear that, Doctor? What was the thought behind that speech? She is already planning to help you! Rest easy! When Annetta starts to do a thing, it is done!"

"Oh, I admit I love young people and their affairs."

"Naturally!" I remarked. "Do not the young flock together?"



"Oh, I am no longer young. I never stoop to deceive myself on that score, boy!"

"Pshaw!"

"Pshaw indeed!" said the Count. "I find her young—and no prude, either."

"I never thought the Gräfin a prude."

"I have lived with the Graf fourteen years," she said, sweetly. "Edward, do you number among your acquaintances any woman who you believe could do that and remain a prude?"

"If you do," said the Count, "send her here and let her try!"

"No, it cannot be done here," she answered smiling. "It will have to be in the hunting lodge in Krain, or in some other of the Count's pet sardinetins for two."

He roared again. She continued, now seriously once more.

"But, Edward, you must not try to run away with her. It simply won't do!"

"Gräfin, she would not go with me. I know her well! My only hope would be to see her once more and bid her good-bye."

She bent earnest eyes upon me, and the kind eyes began to blink. Then she rose from the table.

"It shall be done! I don't see my way just this moment, but I swear I shall manage it!"

"It is settled, Doctor," said the Count. "You will get to say your 'good-bye forever.'"

I had less faith than the Count; but that only showed that, by reason of his eighteen or nineteen years of superior experience perhaps, he knew women better, or, at least, knew the Gräfin better.

CHAPTER XV

THE days lengthened into a week and the week into a fortnight, and if my hopes had been raised by the Gräfin they had settled again by now. During this time I neither saw, nor heard from, either her or the Count. However, coming one day from the city I dropped into the Café Central and met the Count coming out.

"Ah, Doctor, glad to see you! I have just sent you a line. The Gräfin is ill and thinks you ought to come and see her."

"Ill!" But the Count looked curiously cheerful. He even winked.

"The note will appoint Thursday evening. Comfort her all you can."

And he walked off with his debonair swagger, smiling, and breaking out into a whistle.

The Count was a queer fellow! I knew that he loved, and above all was proud of, his wife, notwithstanding his occasional journeys to Coventry where she perforce sometimes sent him. Probably she was not much ill, but not able to leave the house, and wanted to explain why she had not been able as yet to make any effort in my behalf.

On Thursday evening I was shown into the Count's drawing-room and kept waiting awhile. One low-turned gas jet was burning and the rich room was full of shadows and oppressive. After ten minutes or so the little son of the house, aged four years, ran in and tumbled onto my knee. Little Robert and I had been sworn friends for his years. The little fellow was his father's son, as the

Gräfin always insisted, much to the Count's laughter and delight. He was what the Count had been at his age, and, one day would be what the Count was now.

"W'ere oo been?"

"Oh, around."

"'Round' w'ere?"

"Oh, down town, and home, and two or three other places."

"W'y don' oo tome he'e of'ner?—I dot uh new tite."

"Is that so? Can you fly it?"

"No I tant. Johann do dat fo' me. W'ere oo doin' t'night?"

"Going to stay here for awhile."

"W'at fo?"

"I want to see your mamma. Is she better?"

"Bettuh?"

"Yes. Is she still sick?"

"Mamma no' sit 'tall!"

"She has been though, has she not?"

"No! W'y oo say so funny t'ings, Dottor? Has oo 'ad a d'ink?"

"No—I am—sober. But—I thought your mamma was sick. Your papa told me so, I thought."

"Dat funny! Say, Dottor, you dot a dirl?"

"No. Robert, I can't find one."

"Hy-ee! Dey plen'y 'roun'! I dot t'ree!"

"Three! That's too many, Robert. You can not manage them."

"Oh, yes, I tan! Papa say I dood as he is. Dottor! I no' b'lieve oo not dot a dirl. Oo des won' tell!"

"I used to have one, Robert, but I have lost her."

"*Los'* huh? Det nudder den! Dey 'roun'!"

Here it was again;—the same old recipe, now

from the mouth of a child. But I had not graduated from that school.

"Dottor, oo not jolly t'night. W'ot ma'er wif oo?"

"You are jolly enough for two, little man."

"W'y oo ast if mamma sit?"

"I thought she was, Robert."

"S'e no' sit. S'e dot tom'p'y."

"Oh! Well, we will have to wait until the company goes. We can be company for each other."

"S'e no' go. S'e pitty 'ady! *Awfu'* pity 'ady! S'e ben 'ere t'ree fo' days. S'e nun."

In my blank astonishment I started half up and allowed the child to fall headlong onto the floor. It was a moment or two before I realized that a pair of very indignant and reproachful eyes were measuring me with great earnestness.

"W'y oo do dat, Dottor? I didn' do not'in!"—and his little under lip began to tremble. I gathered him in my arms, but do not remember more that the little fellow said. His governess soon came in and carried him off, and it was but a moment later that the Graf and Gräfin both appeared. The Gräfin said:

"I have just seen Robert's governess. I fear he has let the cat out of the bag."

"He has! Heaven bless him!"

"Well, that anticipates my surprise. But no matter. She will be in presently. She will do nothing wrong, Edward. Don't try to persuade her. Remember the veil!"

The Count leaned over and whispered in my ear.

"Clear out!—both of you! *I'll* take the responsibility!"

"Now you have heard some deviltry, Edward!



It is always that when the Count whispers. He is a bad counsellor. But I am not afraid."

Another warm handshake and more kind words from both, and they excused themselves. I waited standing, probably five minutes, unable either to see or to swallow. There came a faint rustle at the farther door. I stopped—came again—and was once more still. Then the heavy portieres parted and she entered, her hands clasped and her eyes upon the floor. She stopped about ten feet away from me and waited—thus. I could not speak. I only saw her dimly.

I am not quite sure how it came about nor how long a time elapsed beforehand, but at last I found myself kneeling at her feet with one of her hands in mine, covering it with kisses—yet I couldn't see the hand. I felt the other trembling about my hair and looked up and tried to see her in the dim light. The two hands came to my face. She bent, kissed me on the forehead and laid her cheek upon it. My own arms went about her shoulders, and for a moment we remained so. Then she broke away and tottered into a chair crying and sobbing, suppressed, but trembling from head to foot

I remained half sitting, half kneeling and buried my head in my arms on a chair seat. After a moment I heard a step and looked up.

The Gräfin had come in. Her own face was wet and she was sobbing. She knelt by me and took my head in her arms.

"*Take* her, and go!—if she will! I'll no longer stand in the way. I leave you, for good or ill; and God bless you both!"

I heard her retreating and the closing of the door after her.

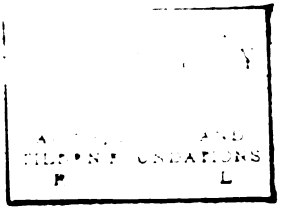
I dragged myself to Gisela and buried my



"She stopped about ten feet away."

(*Accursed Roccos.*)

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head in her lap. Trembling hands again hovered about my head and face, just touching me.

"Oh, Gisela! Why! Why! Why!" But she answered no word—I only felt her tears and the half shadowy touch of her hands, now here, now there, on my head and shoulders. And thus we were for a long time.

At last I could bear it no longer. I sat back and seized her hands. She fell back in the chair, pale and weak. At last I could see her eyes, heavy and wet, but the same beautiful and still more sad Dalmatian eyes that had haunted me since that St. John's evening when I had first seen them.

"Gisela, they have both told me to take you and go. Both the Graf and the Gräfin. Will you go?"

She burst out crying, this time without restraint.

"Oh—Ed-uard—I—can not! I—can—not!"

The paroxysm passed and after she had quieted a little I made another appeal.

"Gisela, you can if you will. Your vow is only binding as far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned. The rest of the world does not recognize such a vow. There are other churches into which you can go—as Christian ones as the Roman Church."

She covered her face with her hands and trembled.

"Gisela, you were not in your right mind when you took the vow. There are plenty of Roman Catholics themselves who would not consider such a vow binding."

No answer. Only trembling.

"We can go to-night. The Gräfin has left us alone and expects us to go. Let us go, then! Be my own dear wife! We can be out of Austria before morning. We will go to far away America

and begin all anew and in peace and happiness. Come, dear one! Go with me! I love you and you love me. We will never part again. Come! Come, dear one"——

I arose, bent down and put my arms about her shoulders. I would have kissed her. In sudden frantic strength she held my head away and screamed in fright:

"No! Not on my lips! If you do, I am lost!—lost! Oh, Ed—Edu—Eduard, l-loose me, if you love me! If you do not wish me damned forever—loose me, Edu—— Lo-ose me!"

She sprang from the chair and paced the room, now her arms outstretched with upturned face, now with them hanging by her sides, and her head bowed. Her face was whiter than the linen head-dress which surrounded it and her eyes widely opened, were larger than ever.

I made one more appeal and she stood still to listen.

"Gisela, you never could be damned for loving and marrying me. That would be no sin! Nor could you be damned for breaking a vow made when you were not in your right mind. That also is no sin! You risk nothing in coming to me. But darling, you do not think of *me*. What is to happen to *me* if I have to live without you? Have you thought of that? For I shall always love you and be true to my love. What does that mean for me, Gisela?"

"Dear, dear Eduard, it is only something that could never have been!"

"You could have married me!"

"No, Eduard!"

"Tell me why! I have a right to know!"

"It is better that you never know, dear Eduard."

"I insist, Gisela! I have the right!"

"Then I will tell you. But you must swear by your love for me that you will never act on this information, and above all will never raise your hand in revenge or anger against any human being now living by reason of anything I shall tell you."

"Why am I to swear that?"

"Because you have had misery and trouble enough on my account! Because I shall never allow myself to place you where I have been! That is why, dear. If you will solemnly swear this and make me believe you will keep your oath, I will tell you. Otherwise I shall remain silent."

I had no idea of what was coming and I hated to give the word; for once given—to her—it would have to be kept. But I had to know; not by reason of mere curiosity, but in order to see a way to combat her position now,—or if not now, at some later time.

"Very well, Gisela, I swear it."

"And by your love for me will you keep your word, Eduard?"

"Yes, Gisela."

"Very well. But I think the knowledge will not make you happier, Eduard."

"Go on, dear. There can't be many more dregs for me to drink now. Let me hear it."

"I shall have to go back to Cattaro in my explanation, Eduard. In the first place, except your violinist friend and my poor helpless self, you did not have one real friend in Cattaro. You thought the banker was your friend—and so he was for a time. But later he would have sacrificed you to save his schemes. I do not call that friendship."

This communication *did* surprise me. However, she was speaking collectedly and firmly now—and,

too, must know the inside history of the affair much better than I. I was conscious of a certain pride in the fact that I had not gone to him for help.

"Go on, dear."

"You carried two dispatches, one to him from Montenegro, and one reply to Cettinje."

"Yes."

"You did not know what was in these dispatches. Later, Paulo was imprisoned. So were a number of others from different parts down there. Thinking Paulo a Servian sympathizer, two others became friendly with him. From them he learned what the dispatches contained, exactly how they were transferred, and between whom they went. The first dispatch was from the Pan-Servian association, containing a draft for a large sum of money and a statement of the different districts and names of the persons among whom a certain shipload of arms and ammunition was to be portioned out. The return dispatch contained a list of the things on this ship, told where it was lying, how it was to be unloaded, together with the secret signs and words by which the people on the ship would know that they were delivering the cargo to the persons for whom it was intended."

"Be seated, Gisela," and I drew up a chair. "Well?"

"Eduard, if the contents of these dispatches had ever become known the whole Pan-Servian association would have been exposed, and all the banker's wealth would not have been enough to save him. He used you as his messenger because you were exactly suited to the task. You were a foreigner, honorable, and even with no interest in the matter. He could trust you, as he could not an-

other soul, and no notice would have been taken of you if it had not been for one person who overheard you and him in his private office."

"I know—his private secretary."

She nodded and went on.

"Eduard, if it had ever become known that you carried these dispatches, knowing them to be of political character, as indeed you must have known, you would now be among those at Agram, and would share their fate, whatever that is to be, not to mention one or two years of imprisonment beforehand. Remember, too, that you unwittingly helped the banker to make a fool of the General Commandant at Cattaro, in the arrest of Paulo.

And there was another and even more serious thing—that I am sure you have never heard about, but you would have been mixed in it. You know of Signor Sbutega's private secretary. This man was a second cousin of Paulo. About two months after you left Cattaro, he was found drowned."

"Found drowned!"

"Yes. By people outside, this was looked upon as a mere accidental death; but Paulo was told when and how it occurred. And the reason was that he had carried information of Signor Sbutega's plans to my uncle and others. Paulo also found out that you, Eduard, were the person who informed Signor Sbutega of this man's treachery. The only thing they could never learn was how you yourself became informed of it.

If this had become known you would have been implicated in a political crime as well, and the two things together would have gone not lightly with you, Eduard, for as you will see, my people would have made the utmost use they could of it. You see, do you not, that your going with a false letter

and deceiving the Commandant and later receiving the real one and delivering it would have been proof enough that you were not acting innocently, do you not, Eduard?"

"Yes, they could have made me trouble enough, all right."

Indeed, it would not have taken the tenth part of all this in those troubled times to bring about my long incarceration, to say the least. There was far less against those other luckless men, as any one who ever read the absurd evidence put forward by the government knows well enough. I realized that I had had a very real escape, somehow.

"Well, if Paulo had all this material why did he not act?"

"He, or rather they, did, Eduard. Just wait! They did not denounce you, because they had a more useful purpose for the information. Their first step was to do away with the banker's protection of you. They feared you might use this for me, and they wished also to do away with it so they could work upon me through you."

I began to see the light.

"They went to the banker and gave him the choice of ceasing to protect you and coming over to their plans, or of being denounced for his political plans and for his political murder, and further the false imprisonment of Paulo. It seems that the Signor was not frightened for himself, but feared the exposure of his plans. Anyway he agreed."

"To cease to protect you or me?"

"Yes."

"I see. Go on, Gisela."

"It seems that the matter rested so for a long time—as long as I was willing to remain at home; for you must know that I knew nothing of all this,

Eduard, until a long time later on. Well, then, Eduard, I received a letter from Lubitza."

"Well, dear?"

"I hate to speak of it—because you have never mentioned the matter, Eduard."

"Never mind, Gisela dear. Let us have it all now."

"It was about the dinner in her rooms a few days after your friend's début."

"Oh-h! So she wrote *that* to you!"

"Yes, Eduard."

"Well! All that she could say truthfully was that I got very drunk, and if she wrote you how it really was you would see that it was at least an accident." Then I related the whole story, including my puzzle over the letter on the desk.

"She did not write it quite so, Eduard. She added much to that. I will not—can not—tell you all she wrote. I am sorry I have not the letter still, but I destroyed all such things when I took the veil. But she made me believe that you had quite forgotten me. You see, dear, I was, then, still believing that you had written the 'Cara' letter to her.

Then the Ingenieur came to Cattaro and made love to me, trying to get me to marry him. He got me out of the house to meet him by appointment just once—by writing that he had special news of you to tell me. In this communication he pretended he did not know that Lubitza had written to me, and told me that dinner party story all over again."

"My friend Harry was there and could tell you just what occurred, Gisela."

"Oh, I did not believe quite all they said, but I did think you had forgotten me. The Ingenieur pretended that you had supplanted him in Lubitza's



favors and were planning with her for the estate. The latter I did not believe—but my cousin was a pretty woman and always had attracted men, and I thought you might have gone to her. You—never—wrote me a line—nor—sent me a message, Eduard."

Then she wept a little again.

"I never wrote because I thought you had been playing with me, Gisela."

"Yes, but I only knew that after I had seen you again. At this meeting with the Ingenieur, Paulo and uncle had followed us—they had forced my letter away from Teresa—they had been spying upon our two or three chance meetings before—and when I returned to my room uncle burst in upon me and accused me of trying to take the Ingenieur away from my cousin, and told me I must either renounce him or leave the house. Nothing I could say would put this absurd idea out of uncle's head.

Overmann kept following and meeting me whenever I would go out. I always told him what I thought of him but he did not seem to care. Finally Paulo saw us talking together another time and again told uncle. Then uncle ordered me to leave. I packed my trunks, took the thousand crowns uncle gave me because I could not do otherwise, and left on the boat. Vienna was the only place I could think of, and I decided to come to you and ask you to help me. But I met Cecilie on the train and went to her. I still meant to find you, Eduard, but the Ingenieur found me out by tracing us up. Cecilie is such a striking girl that the guards on our train all remembered her, and me with her.

Then he still tried to get me to marry him. He kept telling me you had forgotten me, and was

visiting my cousin. He gave me money and told me uncle was sending it, but would not hear from me. Then when I persistently refused to marry him and finally began to refuse to see him when I could, he finally told me that he, and not uncle, was furnishing my support, and unless I would agree to marry him he would do so no longer. With this I told him to go and never come again. But he did not leave at once. Instead he sat down and asked me if I were planning to go to you. When I asked him what business of his my plans were, he answered that he would show me how they were his business. After saying this he explained your circumstances, and after I understood them he dared me to go to you. He solemnly assured me that if you ever took part in my affairs again that they would denounce you at once, and ruin you. Besides that he taunted me further with your visiting Lubitza and insisted that you had taken her away from him, and were in love with her. So I never sought you out, Eduard.

After this Cecilie and I moved to Porzellan street, where we were when you finally took us away. I was trying to get away from him and yet remain with Cecilie. Then later we moved to your house. I consented to this move because I thought you would be safe in receiving me if you did not actually take any part in the affair.

I rejoiced in this change, for I was sure, now, that you still loved me, whatever your relations with my cousin might have been. Cecilie said you loved me, and I supposed we might be married, for while I knew you must be kept from the danger of trying to help me, yet I had not realized then that that danger still threatened you in case of our marriage itself. I would have said 'yes' that even-



ing if you had told me you loved me, without asking me to account for my previous months. But I understood your suspicions of me, Eduard, and also I was still believing there had been something between you and my cousin, and my pride wouldn't let me speak out, even if I had dared to tell you how things really were. And it was only the second day after that that I understood that I would never dare marry you until I was of age, and this occurrence made me resolve to sacrifice marriage altogether in favor of making my cousin pay dearly for her victory. It was not that I did not love you, Eduard. But I was possessed of this idea. Sleeping or waking I could never get away from it, and I came to realize that if I tamely stood by and allowed my cousin to win our battle of a lifetime, I could never have any peace for hatred. It was impossible for me to do otherwise than I did. My reason and my heart regret my act; but if it were to do over again, I should do it just the same, because I would *have* to, Eduard.

Well, the second day after our conversation that evening when we left the opera, I was leaving the house to go down town when I almost collided with my uncle and the Ingenieur as I turned the corner of Nussdorfer street. Uncle said he wished to speak with me. I had your cautions in mind and at first would not go with them; but we finally agreed to go down town in the tram to the parlors of the Imperial Hotel until I could hear what they had to say.

When we got there, uncle explained the situation you were in. The Ingenieur had partly explained it before, but they made it all very clear this time. They they gave me the choice. It was to resign absolutely my estate and not marry until

my majority, or have them denounce you to the Austrian Government. Furthermore, they agreed that if I would sign their paper they would later give me one-fourth of my estate, and after June seventeenth I might marry whom I pleased."

"Oh! That explains why I was asked to renounce all claim to your estate while I was trying to set you free!"

"Did you do it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, Eduard, I pretended to accept this and signed their paper. It was a statement admitting that I had not lived according to the will. Remember your promise, Eduard!"

"Oh! I'll not forget it, dear child," I answered, wearily.

"But I laid my own plans. I determined to do what I had often thought of—to give my cousin the last remaining thing of any value which would be left of my patrimony,—and to give it to her as a wedding present. I never planned to strike the Ingenieur. I only did that because he seized me and the contact of his hands was so hateful that I did it in self-defence.

Of course, I knew this step meant resigning you forever—but I simply did not allow myself to think of that. I kept only in mind the thing I had to do. You see, Eduard, I had only loved you three years, and had never actually seen much of you. My love for you was rather an ideal and not so directly connected with you in person. But I had hated my cousin for my lifetime, had been brought up with her, and that hatred was actual and personal.

I decided to leave Vienna, at first because I feared, being with you, that I might break silence as to uncle's plan—and I knew you would fight it

and thereby get into their net. Later, after our very last interview, I determined to go all the more, because I feared you would break down my resolve.

I went to St. Agatha's convent because it bore my mother's name. I arranged to go there with the understanding that after a little time I might enter the novitiate. Then I left for Munich, but came back the following night and went directly to the convent with a sister. When the time came to come to Vienna again I asked leave to go into the village. A sister went with me, but I easily eluded her, bought a hat, blouse and skirt, telegraphed you and came to Vienna. I did not wish to go to a hotel because I feared the convent would inquire for me. I told you my trunks had not come. I had not brought any. I had two stored at a spediteur's. That is why I could not let you get them for me. Now you know all, Eduard."

I thought over this narrative for a long time. With all this material in their hands, I wondered that the Signor and the Ingenieur had allowed my own trial to go so lightly. After some thought, however, I realized, so far as my trial was concerned, that all this was not only immaterial, but dangerous for them and their ill-gotten interests as well.

Gisela had not told her story as straightly and unbrokenly as I have given it. It had been punctuated by many a sob and moan and breaking into tears.

There was plenty of murder in my own heart as I listened to the tale of bullying intrigue and falsehood, and the time came when I said to myself that she had served her cousin rightly; for now, knowing her better, I felt that Lubitza had

been the moving spirit of it all. As for the Ingenieur and her uncle,—my hands were tied. More was the pity!

Well, I would forget it;—forget all the past, and turn to the present.

"Eduard, never forget your oath! I would not have you where I am. Never forget!"

"I will faithfully keep my word, dear. I am leaving Vienna forever in a couple of days, and I'll never see them again."

Her head bent to her knees.

"Going—away—forever!"

It was only whispered, and hoarsely; but I heard it. I crossed over to her, kneeled down and took her hands once more.

"Gisela, once more, go with me! We will never have another chance. Now we are free to go. We'll never see one another again if you don't?"

"O Eduard—Eduard, don't—don't—don't ask me again! I can not—I—I *can not* do it! I can—not—ca—an—ca—a"——

She broke into a torrent of crying and wailing. I held her hands and her head rested on mine. She moaned and wept and kept saying, "I can—not—can not—can—not."

Once more, little by little, the weeping ceased. Then the sobs became farther and farther apart. Finally she was still, her cheek still resting upon my head.

"Gisela, listen. It is only your will that is in the way of our happiness—your will and pride. Is that worth while, dear?"

"No, that—is not—all, Eduard. I have received—absolution for my sin. If I break—my vow, that will be cancelled and I will be excommunicated and

cursed,—be denied a last sacrament, and never be buried in holy ground!"

What could I answer to that? It did not appeal at all to *me,* but it did to her. It would never disturb *me,* if I were to be cursed by any number of priests; but for *her* to go through life with such a thing hanging over her head—dear, high-strung, nervous being that she was—*that* was another thing! Her beliefs were as settled as mine were! How could she ever be happy, even for an hour?

I was brought to silence. My arguments were at an end, and I saw the end of my hopes. Once more came the leaden feeling in the breast and throat which had descended upon me when the attorney had informed me that she must take the veil,—this time multiplied tenfold.

It could do neither of us any good to prolong the parting further. Moreover I realized that Gisela could not endure much more. Her head was resting heavily upon mine and her elbows kept slipping weakly off of trembling knees as she was trying to support her body.

I took her face between my hands and gazed into the lovely eyes long and with an aching heart. Then I rose, bent and kissed each dear hand long and hard, and moved away a pace or two. She also unsteadily rose to her feet.

"Is there no hope, then, Gisela? Perhaps some time in the future"——

She raised her head, holding her arms out appealingly before her.

"My vow—could only—be loosed by the Holy Father himself! There is—no hope—no—hope."

She dropped her hands and her arms hung by her side. She raised her lovely eyes and looked

long into mine. Her face grew white. She whispered: "Good—good—b-bye, Eduard."

"Good-bye—my loved one!"

Her head bent and she turned. Slowly she paced the length of the long room. At the door she slowly turned and looked at me once more, and now the beautiful eyes recalled that St. John's evening when I had seen them first, by the light of the fire on the beach. For one passing instant I fain would dream that that night was only now passing by and that I should see her again in a cathedral, and that past events had been but an ugly phantasy. But the instant was short.

She turned from me again and passed through the door. I watched the white headdress go slowly out of sight in the gloom.

The low-turned gas-jet flickered. I heard a distant door close, and was alone. Still I watched the door by which she had left the room. Gradually the heavy portieres ceased to swing. All was very still. I heard the Rath-house clock give one stroke. Then that was all.

CHAPTER XVI

ONE very gusty and rainy evening, a few days after the events of the preceding chapter, found me in my rooms in the course of my last packing preparatory to leaving Vienna the following day. I had had my last two trunks brought down from the store-room. One had already been packed and closed, and I was standing over the other, dreading to open it.

This last trunk contained the old violin, in its case.

I was dreading to open it partly because of the bitter regret which the actual sight of the instrument was sure to bring, and partly because of a resolve I had made concerning it.

I had promised her that it should never pass from my hands into the ownership of another, except herself, and yet it was impossible for me to keep it. I had never seen the instrument itself since I had packed it in Cattaro and shipped it to Vienna, and it was still in the wrappings in which it had traveled. But I would have to see it now, as to carry out my resolve the whole would have to be reduced to pieces small enough to be crowded through the small door of the tall porcelain stove in my room.

I remembered Harry's request, but good friend as he was, I could not give it to him.

I might have stored it in some dim attic, but I would always know it was there, and remember it, and other things with it. That was what I had done the last three years,—and I had always known

it was there,—and remembered. But in the past the memory had been rather a comfort; for then the door had not finally closed upon her as it now had. Now, my reason kept telling me again and again that my only salvation from some sort of a mental derangement, greater or less, lay in using every means in my power, not to forget her, for the thought of that was folly, but to bring once more between us that kind veil which had once parted us, and which had served to keep out the sharper arrows, leaving only a certain half-sad sweetness to filter through. As long as this old relic existed that could never now occur. I would bury it in fire; that great purifier and obliterator of all things, and as it would burn I would hope that, as far as possible, the sharpest of my memories would follow it.

I stood over the dusty trunk with the key in my hand. Time and again my arms went out to open it, and time and again refused to obey my will. The night was little suited to such a memory as it would bring up;—the rain was falling unsteadily, and now and then a heavy gust of wind and rain would beat against the windows, making them and even the very doors creak and rattle. The sight of the violin would recall one of the loveliest hours I had had with her, when I was full of hope, anticipating only happiness, and little dreaming of what the future was to bring.

Finally I dropped the key and began to pace the floor, my memories gradually getting the better of me.

She, too, had given up her all for me—except one thing. Had she not been obsessed by the fixed idea of visiting retribution upon her cousin, we would be together now, and would have had

enough to make us happy. It never occurred to me to blame her for giving me up for revenge. She could not help it—she was not accountable for the choice. As the lawyer had more than half hinted, she was not insane. But she had lived in that uncertain border-land sometimes occupied by those of sensitive disposition who become the victim of the fixed idea—a state of mind which often can be corrected and even turned into useful channels when loving and intelligent friends and well-wishers do their duty. This advantage she had never had—on the contrary, she had been driven along the predestined lines by those who surrounded her.

Most useful people in the world have been useful because they have had a fixed idea. When this takes a normal line as the direction of science, invention, exploration, objective religion and other ways that lie in the sunlight, it produces our valuable men and women. But when it follows the dark paths of self-gratification, egoism, avarice, revenge and subjective theology, it leads surely into the dark borderland, and often farther still. While the host of the fixed idea is still young, it lies largely within the power of parents and guardians to determine its continuance or suppression. So, very often, the blame for the consequences of an ill-directed fixed idea lies at the door of such parents or guardians, and the Raven must ever sit upon their heads.

So had it been with Gisela. It might not have been easy for some men to have forgiven her choice of revenge against the choice of her love. It would even have helped some men to forget her. They would have reasoned; she chose her revenge against her love for me; ergo, she did not love me. There-

fore she was not worth while, and I shall forget her. And they would.

But I understood her better. I knew that she had loved me more than she had hated her cousin, but that the latter passion, through long habit and long residence in her, had absorbed and dominated her *attention* the more.

But all the reasoning in the world could not change a single past fact, and I paced the floor in vain. Finally I threw myself into a chair, buried my face in my arms, and for the first time gave way to what is supposed to be unmanliness. It proved to be the opening of the safety-valve, and after a time I rose from the chair prepared to carry out my intention.

I went to the trunk, opened it, and drew out the package,—the only thing the trunk contained,—and brought it to the table. A knife quickly disposed of the cords and wrapping, and I saw the beautifully carved case once more.

As the lock of the case had disappeared I had bound it about with a long length of wide silk ribbon, in order not to injure the carved work. This I cut away. Then I opened the case and lifted out the ancient instrument. Three of the strings Harry had put on were still in place, so it had nearly its normal dressed-up appearance. I turned it over again and again. Once more its lovely lines caused all else for the moment to step into the background. Again I worshipped the perfection of the inlaid lines, the beautiful cut of the *f*-holes, the elegant scroll, the exquisite arching of the chest and back, the richness of the age-toned old gold varnish, lovely figure in the wood of the back, and the ever varying play of the lights and shadows about the



curves of the instrument as it was turned about in the light.

Let him, who may be ever so good a mediocre builder, try to copy the master's work, and what is the result? He may measure and compare, minute by minute, hour by hour, take months where the master took only days, and labor with love; but although the finished copy may be a good one, nevertheless there remains ever something which raises the handiwork of the master above the copy. Perhaps you can not just point out the difference—but it is there, and you know the work of the master; and you are not mistaken.

Surely this exquisite work was made for better things than to lose its lovely voice and its very name, and one day to be burnt to ashes by some man whimpering under the lash of Fate. It was made to command a great orchestra; to thrill under the flying fingers of the virtuoso; to sing out over the heads of a worshipping audience; to charm the ear of the enthusiast, and one day perhaps, after having helped some human being to greatness, to have a well earned rest under glass in some collection or in some city building. For *that* its maker had fashioned it!

But so had its previous owner been fashioned for better things—and by a greater Master still. It should share her fate, and be forgotten.

I drew up a chair so that its back would be within correct striking distance, and picked up the violin by the head and scroll. Even in this moment I could not help but handle the beautiful thing with a certain care. I faced the chair, measured the distance so that the middle of the violin back should strike the top, and raised the instrument high over my head.



"Surely this exquisite work was made for better things than . . . one day to be burnt to ashes by some man whimpering under the lash of Fate."

(*Accursed Roccos.*)



One who has ever tried to carry out some small surgical procedure upon himself knows how, with all the will in the world, *something* will hold back the hand at the crucial instant. The motor area of the brain, ordinarily subject to the will, receives a superior stimulus from the sensory tracts, and becomes disobedient. It was so at this moment. With all the determination in the world, I could not strike. A second special willing of the intention only caused my thumb to slip off of the A string, and the violin sang out in its pitiful tired unresonant voice, as if in a cry for help.

Once more with full determination, I held the violin further back; but as I was about to bring it forward for the blow, a specially heavy gust of wind and rain shook the windows, and it seemed as though a cold hand grasped my wrist and held back the stroke. I glanced nervously behind me and laughed a little.

Well, after all, there were other ways to reduce a violin to kindling wood than by striking it across a chair back.

At this moment I remembered a dispute which had once occurred between me and Harry. I had maintained that the base-bar of a violin must run from end to end of the chest, while he had insisted that it stopped a little short of both the head and foot. I decided I would see which of us had been right.

I let down the strings, and removed them and the tailpiece together. Then I took up the knife, inserted it under the edge of the chest at the foot, and "walked" the knife along the violin sides. After a moment the entire chest came loose, and I lifted it off, and turned it over to examine it, placing the rest of the instrument upon the table.

Yes, Harry had been right. Moreover, at the head end of the chest I noticed an extensive blackened place. Thinking it probably decayed I tried it with my thumb nail, but found it sound. With the thought that it had probably once been water or oil soaked, and that that would account for the loss of tone, I tossed the chest upon the table, and turned to the remainder of the instrument, following the chest with my eyes, as I picked up the other portion.

When my eyes finally turned to the remainder of the violin, I suddenly dropped it and started back with an exclamation of genuine fright. There in the left shoulder of the violin was what I first took to be some small animal—a rat, or gigantic spider in a nest.

Realizing in a moment, however, that no such thing could have got inside of a violin, I came back to the table and examined it closer, at first with little light, as it, whatever it was, was buried in the accumulated dust and cobwebs of very many years.

I cleared away this accumulation from the top by scraping it with the knife, and then saw that it was a packet—a little packet done up in parchment, sealed throughout with ancient wax, and securely fastened by every edge to the back and sides of the violin by means of an excess of the wax. In growing excitement and with a trembling hand which threatened to do damage, I pried out the package. Then I seated myself and hastily broke the seals.

The opening revealed three other packets; a small case, a tiny discolored envelope, and a third larger inclosure which had occupied most of the space.

I opened the small case. It contained a ring of

ancient workmanship, bearing an immense diamond. This, at least, had lost no lustre during its long confinement. It sparkled and glittered as though it were rejoiced to be free. I was no judge of such things, but could see that it was a gem of blue radiance, and that its value must be very great. But I did not stop long over it just then.

Hastily opening the tiny envelope I found its contents to be the original label of the violin.



So then, the violin was from the hand of Joseph Guarnerius "del Gesu."

For a moment only I examined this. It was no surprise, since it only corroborated what all who had ever seen the instrument had known at a glance —that it was the work of a foremost master hand.

I now opened the third, last and largest packet. Rolled within this was a document. It was in good condition, the ink a little pale and the parchment very yellow, but perfectly legible.

It was, however, written in a curious cramped minute script, and upon trying to read it I found it to be in Italian and in an old dialect. I knew more Italian by this time than I had in Cattaro, and had the document been in classical Italian and modern script I could have read a good part of it at once.

In this case an exact translation was beyond me, but after spending hours over it, I was able to gather enough of its meaning to feel sure that I knew its general purport. It was a sort of will, and the signature of Albina Portulan concluded it.

In it was some reference to a son born out of wedlock; references to days of sin and strife, and a mention of another will; a reference to the female heir of the fourth generation. The name "Le Tre Sorelle" occurred in the same sentence with "heritage" and "above ground and under ground" and "by far the largest part of my possessions." Here, also, was some mention of the "accursèd Roccos."

Further on I deciphered, "even its servants are turning away from the Church" and "no person to trust." There were some words about "taking possession" and "may the Church bless and forefend her."

There was reference to a ring. I was able to read in full "seek longest in that part of the house where the spirit of God is most likely to abide."

Then the will recited what seemed to be a curse, directed, as far as I could gather, at any one who should interfere with the course of either will—a long and comprehensive curse, speaking of her own return, and which seemed to include the sixth generation.

The will concluded with the date—the thirtieth day of June, seventeen hundred eighty-nine, and the words "May the Republic endure," followed by her signature.

The will had been written, to the very day, just one hundred and twenty years before the death of Lubitza!

I shivered. Was it the sight of the grey shade of her great-grandmother that had brought that

terrible look to Lubitza's face during her last living moment?

But if I could not fully read the ancient document, I knew its sense, and that was that a vast treasure in some form or other existed in the old ruin near Cattaro, in some part of it "where the spirit of God is most likely to abide." I gathered that his treasure belonged to my loved one, from the connection with Le Tre Sorelle; for by the other will, Gisela now owned the supposed worthless ruin.

If that had gone to the Church when she took the veil, it did not matter. It would be easy to acquire ownership of such a worthless piece of property, and my plan already began to take shape. Fate had brought this treasure to my hand, and made me Gisela's guardian, since she was where she could not act for herself; or was it Fate? Had old Albina selected me and taken her own way to bring about the situation? Had it been her imperious will that had so driven me that Christmas Eve out in Cottage? Had it been *her* ghostly hand that had held mine when I would have destroyed the loved instrument of *her* loved one? I glanced fearfully around the shadowy room, half expecting to see her standing there; a state of mind not soothed by the persistent storm which was still raging outside.

My clock struck three. My excitement grew and grew. What this would mean for Gisela was a question which, as yet, had but a shadowy answer, but even so far, in her case, I had learend the power of wealth, and I believed it could be exercised again, even if the wave must reach the feet of the Holy Father himself. That the treasure in Le Tre Sorelle was large—very large—I did not

doubt for a moment. The will clearly spoke of "by far the largest part of my possessions." It must, then, be worth much more than the vineyards were in her day. To-day these were worth a million crowns. Sbutega had said that they had once been worth less than that, but they must have been rich possessions in Albina's day when that land was opulent and prosperous under the beneficent Venetian rule. Besides, in the banker's account the then heir and the Church were pictured as having been in a state of extreme anger at the vast shrinkage of the fortune. This was, then, the lost property, and was far greater than that which the heir-in-trust had received. Yes, there must be enough to buy Gisela's release from the very veil itself—and much more than enough!

My excitement completely mastered me and the revulsion of feeling from black despair to intense joy, produced a kind of madness. A further study of the document was neither possible nor reasonable. Keeping out the ring, I replaced the other articles in the violin whence they had been taken, laid the chest back in place, replaced the violin in its carved box, and re-locked the whole in the trunk.

I lay myself down upon a couch without undressing, and planned incoherently until the day broke. I slept, finally, sometime between six and seven o'clock, dreaming wildly of craters of diamonds and gold, of nuns, stilettos, and of shades of the departed.

I woke about eleven, called my wondering servant, and caused still further astonishment by re-engaging her for an indefinite period, and ordering the first trunk unpacked again. I next visited the Haus-herr and re-engaged the apartment, making

scant reply to his raillery about my changes of mind. These steps were urgent, as I would be too much engaged to be in a position to shunt from pillar to post as regarded my abode. Then, after cautioning my servant not to send any trunks to the storeroom, I left the house and sent an urgent telegram to Harry to come at once; for this would be the time of all times in my life when I would need him.

Then I visited a well known jeweler in the city with a view of having a value set upon the ring.

Very many people in the city knew me by sight and knew of my connection with the notorious tragedy in St. Cecilia's church. More than one inkling of the way Gisela had been railroaded away from "justice" had become current in past months, and one newspaper had even printed one of the usual stinging articles about the miscarriage of justice where the rich were concerned. In short, everybody believed me to be a rich man. This is a great disadvantage, usually, when the belief is ill-founded, but I was glad of it now, as I could show the ring to the jeweler with impunity. And this impression was exceedingly favorable for my future plans, which after sleep began to take a more settled line. Now that hope, even certainty, had come back to me, I was tranquil and happy, and could think more lucidly.

The jeweler gaped and stared when he saw the ring

"Where in the world did you find *this,* Herr Doktor! It is an *ancient* ring!"

"It has been in our family for a century. Its history is rather long. What value has it to-day?"

He donned his magnifier and examined the stone with great care and interest.

"It is a flawless blue diamond of the very finest



quality! It is very difficult to estimate its value—it is so out of the ordinary run of goods. Then, its cutting is of the old style. To re-cut it in modern style will reduce its weight but greatly improve its brilliancy. You could well afford to do it. It is so large that the necessary reduction in weight would scarcely alter its value. Only don't put it in bad hands for the work! Then again, to any one who values a genuine old piece, the ring would be almost priceless as it is. It is difficult to value it. To you, Herr Doktor, who can afford to own it, I would say, *keep* it!"

"I am not thinking of selling it now, but have never had a value set upon it. What is the least you believe it would bring if I decide to sell it later?"

"The least?"

"The very least."

"Eighty-five or ninety thousand crowns," he answered gravely. "Also if you take it to London you will get the hundred. There is the great market, Herr Doktor Ransome."

It was half the sum I had given the convent!

I thanked the old gentleman and he in person held the door for me to pass out.

"If you decide to sell it on the Continent please let me know. No one will haggle or bargain with you over that ring. They will either frankly buy it, or not, according to their circumstances. It would be an advertisement to any house to handle it. If you are offered less than eighty thousand crowns, bring it back here. I will give that much any moment you come."

This intelligence was the last item needed to put me at ease. I did not know, yet, why the ring had been inclosed with the will, but the ring was un-

doubtedly a safe exponent of that which lay concealed somewhere in Le Tre Sorelle.

Our happiness was in sight, and my one regret was that Gisela could not know it for a good while to come. Now, care and caution only were needed. For the present I could only wait, for I must have a precise translation of the will before taking another step.

CHAPTER XVII

HARRY arrived the morning of the next day but one, and I took him and his things directly home. I directed my servant to find temporary rooms outside, and to clear up her work and leave for the day, after two in the afternoon, thus insuring that from then on, Harry and I would be alone in the apartment.

When we were by ourselves, I began my recital. He listened with all the attention I could have asked, but rose excitedly and interrupted me with his favorite word when I came to tell of the intention of breaking the violin over a chair back and burning the pieces.

"You jackass! Did you do it? Tell me at once!"

Then I had his ear again for awhile until he heard how the violin had been opened and what had been found inside. From that moment I realized that his real attention had stood still. He commented variously on the facts but as soon as he decently could he asked to see the violin. Realizing that it was folly to expect anything from him until this wish had been satisfied I got it out, laid its contents upon the table and passed the parts over to him. He examined them with care.

"A very lucky outcome!" he exclaimed. "You have removed the belly without cracking or even chipping it. Ed, if you had smashed this violin I believe I could have killed you!"

Then he called for the label and examined that.

"It is half torn through, but otherwise intact. What *glorious luck!*"

Then he returned to the parts of the violin again.

"This packet was in contact with the base-bar. That fully explains its curious thin dry tone. It is absolutely uninjured, Ed! It only wants putting together and adjusting to be as good as it ever was! You must let me take it to Haudek."

"Go right away, Harry!" I said, laughing. "Because until you have heard it after the repair, I know you will be perfectly useless to me."

"Oh, it isn't so bad as all *that!* But give me the label and parts. Put the other things somewhere else."

He placed the label in another envelope and returned all lovingly to the carved case. Then he turned to me.

"Now I can listen better. Go over the last part again."

I did so.

"Let me see the ring. *A hundred thousand crowns! Gee!* That will buy the two best Stradivarius violins in the world! And for this bauble! Well, that is *something* sure for her, anyway."

"After seeing this ring do you doubt the rest of the treasure?"

"No—not if it still be there."

"If it still be there?"

"Yes. I suppose this will was written at the time she concealed the treasure. Thus it was a hundred and more years ago. Much can happen in that time. However, it is probably still there. I believe they told us that summer that this old witch had not lived in Le Tre Sorelle during her last years. That was a clever move, for the searching for the lost estate naturally was made

where she last had lived. As wise an old partridge as that probably did the concealing well. I have little doubt but that all is still there. But you must act with great caution."

"Yes, I see that. We must manage to get possession of it and turn it into an actual bank account before any inkling of its existence leaks out."

"Yes, and keep silent thereafter for the rest of our lives. Take no one else into your confidence —the Signorina Gisela least of anyone. If a nun have taken the vow of poverty, she can not own property. Also the Signorina may have—indeed, from what you have related, does have, an idealist's notion of her duty.

Also, this will is a very curious one, to say the least. It was made under the jurisdiction of a Republic which has long ceased to exist. There may be a half hundred descendants of Albina who could attack it successfully. I fancy that its only use to the Signorina lies in the information it contains. You say you could not read all of it?"

"No. That is the first item in which I expect your help, Harry. You are at home in Italian."

"Not quite, but I dare say I can read it. I'll make that a job for to-night after all gets quiet."

"Good old boy! What do you suggest further?"

"Your first work is to sell the ring. Since your jeweler advised it, get a letter of introduction from him and take it to London."

"It has occurred to me, Harry, that it would be a good plan for me to become the actual and full owner of Le Tre Sorelle."

"Excellent. Of course it is of no use to the Signorina, or to her convent, or to anybody else. You may be supposed to wish to own it as a memory

of her. No one will see anything unnatural in that, and you can say so, openly."

"And I can buy it for a song. I'll obtain the title through Doctor Sommer. By the way, Harry, that will take some days, and so will the trip to London. We may as well divide these tasks and save time. You go to London and sell the ring for me, while I get possession of Le Tre Sorelle. Then we can go down to Cattaro together."

"All right. What is your plan when you get to Cattaro?"

"So much has not matured yet. We can both be thinking it over."

"Well, I'll translate the will to-night. That may suggest something. And I'll start for London to-morrow night. You can get a couple of letters for me to-morrow."

"Very well."

Late that afternoon Harry laboriously and carefully removed the adhering wax from the inside of the violin and then took it down town to Haudek. When Harry returned he reported that the luthier was as enthusiastic over the instrument as he was.

"I shall look upon the use of this violin for a couple of years as my reward for enduring you as a friend," he remarked, "that is, in case we succeed in putting the treasure safely at her disposal."

"You will, eh?"

"Yes. *You* have shown yourself unfit to have the custody of it!" he asserted angrily.

"Use it your lifetime, old boy!"

"*What?* Done! Now I shall be your real friend, old jack"——

"You wouldn't have been anyhow, I suppose," I laughed.

"As regards that—it is very lucky for you, my

son, that I have not found this violin in kindling wood!"

That evening about ten, Harry sat down to translate the will. It did not prove over easy sailing even for him, and it was after one when he finally announced that he had finished. He re-wrote his draft in an orderly sequence and handed it to me. It read as follows:—

"I, the Signora Albina Portulan, born in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and twenty-eight, second daughter and only surviving child of Pietro Rocco, navigator and merchant, do recommend my soul to God my Creator, to the Sacred Virgin Maria, to the holy Saint of my mother's name, to my holy guardian angel and to the whole Celestial Court; and I entreat their assistance in the moment of my last agony, that I may save this poor soul.

Being now in age and having left to me but one direct heir, namely my son Giuseppe born out of wedlock, I do, by means of this instrument, command that the following things be done.

This day is full of sin and strife and no connection of mine including my son, is worthy to bear the burden of the great fortune of which I shall die possessed. Therefore I have divided my possessions into two unequal parts. Of this the small part, now existing as real property, I have devised by a public will, separate from the present writing. I again direct that the public will just mentioned shall be administered in accordance with its terms, the heir being my female heir of the fourth generation, counting me as the first.

But now mark all ye concerned and in interest!

By this, my second and last and private will hereby embodied in my own hand, I do command

that the heritage of the house known as Le Tre Sorelle shall include all that may therein be found, either above ground or under ground, namely all property of which I shall die possessed except the tracts clearly described in my public will; so thus there shall attach to the inheritress of Le Tre Sorelle by far the largest part of my possessions.

Thus shall I insure that she shall receive the most who loved some other person or thing better than she loved wealth, and thus that no male descendant of the accursed Roccos shall succeed me. For every one of us has, for the sake of wealth, taken either another's life or his own.

When this parchment shall be discovered, that female heir who failed to inherit under my public will, shall at once become the owner not only of Le Tre Sorelle, but also of all that she may find therein, above ground or below ground.

The times are unsettled and all, even the servants thereof, are turning away from the Church. There is no person whom I can trust to carry out my will. Therefore I inclose it in the secret place where it will be found, in the hope that whoever will find it will have enough of the honor and faith which the Church teaches, to enable the carrying out of my wishes.

With this packet I inclose a ring the sale of which will enable the future heir to find the necessary means, if needed for taking possession of her heritage, or of protecting her interests in other ways, until entire possession is obtained.

Let her who seeks further, seek longest in that part of the house in which the spirit of God is most likely to abide. Let her take possession of all she finds, and may the Church bless and forefend her!

Should this parchment fall into hands which make any use of it contrary to my command; or if either will be annulled or interfered with; or if any compulsion, over-influence or purposeful neglect, lead to a miscarriage of what I have commanded in either will, whereby any of my estate be kept out of the hands into which I order it to be given—then may the uttermost Wrath of God descend upon him or her who has disobeyed my will and upon him or her who profit by such disobedience. May the Wrath of God descend upon them—yea unto the sixth generation may they live under God's curse, and die without absolution, hated by Heaven and Earth alike, having a withered death in life, a blasted life forever in death. And if it be in my power, my Shadow shall return to Earth and shall follow him or her, yea unto the sixth generation as I have said.

I write this on the thirtieth day of June in the year of our Lord, seventeen hundred and eighty-nine. May the Republic endure!

ALBINA PORTULAN."

"What an irony!" remarked Harry. "The heir who kept the law was to receive the least!"

"Harry, it is easy to read between the lines! It was not irony. It was just the last word of one who, trying to escape from a curse, found the cup of pleasure and asceticism alike bitter, and turned, at last, with a tremulous groping hand toward simple human charity and tenderness. There are people who go through life unloved by all who come in contact with them, with the result that their own hand is forever raised against their fellows, and yet they are often people who wish to be loved, but cannot be because of unfortunate personal charac-

teristics. I suppose Albina was such a one; and at the end of her life the tenderness for purely human things came uppermost."

At this instant Harry and I, both alike, looked at one another with a start. We both had the feeling as if a cool tender zephyr had caressed our faces—then an impression as though Something that had been present, had left us. And yet doors and windows were closed, and the night was very still.

"Come, Ed, we better go to bed!"

And we soon did.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was one Sunday nearly a month later that Harry and I found ourselves again traversing the beautiful Bocche of Cattaro. I had a letter of credit on the bank at Cattaro but the checks thereon would now be indorsed by another hand, as we had learned that Signor Sbutega, by reason of a sudden ailment, had passed a few weeks before. This news had caused me a more than passing regret, for he had wished to be my friend, and I realized that his willingness to sacrifice me had been to superior force as he saw it. Also I liked to believe that perhaps he would not have deserted me had I personally ever needed him.

Besides the letter of credit, I had in my trunk full title deeds to Le Tre Sorelle, including three metres of ground round about the house. One of these deeds bore Gisela's signature, and the sight of that name on the deed was, alone, worth the price I had paid for the house, although that had been much more than its real value. For I looked upon that deed as a letter to me; the only letter she could write me now.

I carried with me a third possession which was worth more than the others. This was not in writing. It was a consciousness—a piece of knowledge—an assurance, that, given success in my present enterprise, I should be able to obtain the liberty of Gisela. During the past month I had engaged Doctor Sommer to sift this matter. On hearing that I "had come into a large estate" and was, therefore, now prepared to act further in Gisela's

case, he had put on his gravest and most thoughtful air and composed himself to listen.

At first he had shaken his head. He murmured:

"Release of a nun from the veil with permission to marry! Hum! Release—that, yes; not very infrequently, for just reasons, as for instance, the state of bodily health; but absolution from the vow of chastity! Did she take the simple, or the solemn vow, I wonder! That question cuts a large figure in"——

Then he had addressed me directly and impressively.

"They do it, at Rome—perhaps once or twice in a century—for reasons, always grave ones, generally those affecting the welfare of the Church or, sometimes, the State. Also, in this case, certain exceptional circumstances may impress the Bureau sufficiently to bring about a favorable recommendation. The reason for the action will have to be a *very stately* one, Dr. Ransome!" he concluded, drily.

The outcome of our interview was that he had undertaken to give me an "opinion" in a fortnight. I never knew whom he consulted, or what his steps were; but at the end of that period he had delivered himself of the following somewhat Delphic sentence:—

"What the Church took, she will probably give up again;—on the same terms."

I understood. And that I meant to have the treasure if it still existed, goes without saying.

After going through certain formalities in regard to having my title deeds placed on record and taking possession, I engaged men and gave the ruin a thorough cleaning. Other workmen were engaged to fit up and repair doors and windows where

necessary and to make a few other repairs. These measures were necessary before we could be assured of safe privacy in conducting our search. That the workmen had the continuous personal supervision of one of us need hardly be stated. During this time we avoided any close inspection of the interior. Our most delicate task was the obtaining of tools with which to work later on; for the open bringing of such articles of our own into the house would surely have excited remark. Foreseeing this, we had brought along in a trunk the smaller and more suspicious articles we would need, among which were a number of stone-cutters' drills and two short-handled sledge-hammers. But pickaxes, spades and crowbars, two of each, had to be purchased in Ragusa, put into a package labeled "guns," smuggled by night into the house after the workmen had left, and housed in a temporary closet which we had caused them to build for us.

But at last, after many delays, came a day when every workman and loiterer had departed, and Harry and I were free, in privacy, to begin our real work.

Our first step was to do that which we had not dared do earlier, namely, to make a careful tour of inspection.

This did not result in much. There were bare walls, bare stone floors, chimneys, remains of the floor which had once existed between the second floors and the "witches' kitchens," the most of which had fallen and been removed many years before; windows, doors and the roof. We could find no spot where, it seemed to us, "the spirit of God" would be more "likely to abide" than any other. And yet this cryptic sentence in the will

was, in its way, definite, and precluded wild and incoherent searching.

Harry looked hard at me.

"I wonder if there ever was more of this house than now exists?"

We went out of doors and made another inspection. When a house has once been larger and a part has been removed, there are always left traces of the dismemberment. We could find no such signs. The only change that seemed ever to have been made since it had been built was, on the contrary, an addition, or what seemed to have been such. This was a small one and a half story part on the north side with a simple sloping roof, the latter having long since disappeared, leaving the shed like portion open to the sky. Besides, the three sections of the house were just alike, the accommodations of each being the same, and sufficient for the simple manner of living pursued by even the wealthy in those other days. We easily decided that the house had never been larger than it now was.

We returned inside and re-inspected the interior with greater care. It was soon done, for there was so little to examine. Then we seated ourselves upon a bench and looked at one another.

"It begins to look a little fishy," remarked Harry.

"I don't believe it! That treasure is here! That old document is too genuine on its face, and the act was too exactly what might have been expected from such a lonely old woman of her day and circumstances."

"Oh, I believe it was once here, but"——

"It is still here, Harry! If it had ever been found there would have been some tradition or story about it."

"Will it ever become known if *you* find it?"

"Not if I can help it! But *I* know in advance that it is here. Any one else who had found it would have come upon it accidentally, would have been unprepared, and it would have leaked out. Besides, we should at least be able to find where it had been."

Harry nodded.

"We only need to stop being excited, and to reason, soberly, a little. I don't believe the meaning of Albina's phrase is far to seek. She meant the treasure to be found when this parchment was found. Therefore there can't be much riddle to it."

"Very well. Let us reason then. First of all she must have hidden the treasure herself. Now she was a woman; an old woman, presumably having only the physical strength of an old woman; presumably with only that knowledge of masonry and other such men's work which women usually have. Therefore, in our search, we must take into consideration what she would be able to do."

"That is not based upon any facts we have, Harry. She does not say she hid it herself. Her father built the house for the three sisters. He may have hidden it and she may have had the secret only. Probably she was the only one of the three sisters who did know it, as the legend has it that she was Rocco's favorite daughter."

"Or he might have prepared the place and she might have hidden the treasure later on. Very good, Ed."

"Yes, maybe. In those uncertain days, before the modern ways of protecting wealth, it almost goes without saying that every house had some secret hiding place, not only for treasure, but also for the people themselves, on occasion. All around

this gulf you see ancient houses with battlements, gun loop-holes and other arrangements for defence at a moment's notice. Such things go with secret hiding places. Again, while she was a woman, presumably with only the strength of a woman, we must not forget that she had that which largely replaces strength; namely, *time*. Give a mole time and he will move as much earth as a badger. She lived alone here several years after her sisters had died, and she had done her work several years before she herself died at Curzola. She was only sixty-one when she made this will. Say at fifty-one or two she may have been a pretty vigorous woman. Still again it makes a difference in what form the treasure exists. If it consist of jewels like the one she left in the violin, even a vast sum may make but a relatively small package and be easily hidden away. No, Harry! We must not waste time in idle searching, but follow the lead she has given us. These hints are two. First she speaks of what may be found above ground or under ground; secondly, she directs search in that part of the house where the spirit of God is most likely to abide. Let us stick to these."

"Then it is below ground, for there is no other place in this house where a secret vault could be. There is no space unaccounted for here."

"I think it probably *is* below ground. But it would take the whole autumn for two of us to dig up this entire place. We must begin with the other key. Besides it may still be above ground—or may be divided up. Let us stick to the religious reference. That is the true key."

"Well, then, let us search in the top of the house."

This did not appeal to me, but we had time, so

we clambered about the remains of the broken floor, examining every nook and cranny of the walls and roof for a sign. At the end of an hour's work we both agreed that, unless the treasure made a very small package indeed, there was no place for it up there.

Then we took the second floor, seriatim. Doors of later date had been cut through the two division walls, so we readily passed back and forth through the three apartments without going out onto the stone portico in the rear.

"Could the words refer to the old camines?" asked Harry.

"The idea of God residing in a fire-place is a heathen and not a Christian notion, Harry. Besides, she was certainly too shrewd to use for her purpose such a place which would often be disturbed by a repair."

"Well, then, the words can refer to nothing on this floor unless the thing referred to has been removed. Perhaps there was once a prie-dieu and a crucifix here somewhere. An earnest Catholic will often have such an arrangement in the house. But there is no sign of it here now."

"I believe she referred to something more permanent, Harry. She did not wish this will to be found for many years. Therefore she would not attach a key to something that was merely hung up like a picture or stood about."

"Crucifixes are sometimes massive and built into the wall—sometimes one has a niche to itself. I wonder if this camine was always a camine!"

"There is no other and this as well as the other rooms must have had one for use in the winter season. There is no reason to suppose it was ever anything else."

"I believe this is the right track, though!" I continued. "The words must refer to some part of the house especially devoted to spiritual matters. If we better knew the customs of those days it would help us."

"Yes. That is the trouble," he answered.

Harry was pulling at his hair, his shoulders hunched, and looking abstractedly at the floor—a way he had when puzzled.

But that was as far as we got that day and for several days thereafter. Our "reasonings" all failed us. We hit upon this spot and that one. We excavated the closed window behind the old tablet merely coming upon the stone of the tablet itself. We examined the basement-floor with the same care we had the others.

Harry suggested boring the ground systematically.

"With what?" I asked. When it came to purely mechanical things, Harry was no very luminous light, and he admitted it. Of course we did not fail to keep in mind some defensive retiring place of the sort we had discussed, but to dig and bore at random all over the place for this would have taken us months, nor did we think it safe to disturb the house more than we could help for there was always the possibility of a visitor coming in upon us, and we wished to be able to admit any such person, as freely as possible. So we kept to the key given in the will, for some days without result. It was not until we had striven for more than a week that the light broke, and then it came by accident.

Harry and I had retired to take luncheon at noon one day, to the shade of a straggling growth of fruit and olive trees which grew on the hillside

behind the house. From where we were we could see the areaway behind the house, but at the moment of this occurrence we were talking of the old violin. Harry had just informed me that Herr Haudek having had an indisposition, had not been able to finish the repairing up to the time we had come away.

"By the way, Harry, it does not seem to me that old Albina showed much foresight in placing her will in that violin. It might have been repaired by somebody in earlier years."

"You are wrong, my son. It was well thought out. In her days, these master-violins had comparatively little value and there were more of them extant. Thus there were fewer repairs. It is only another example of the fact that the simplest and most unexpected ways of concealment are safest. You see most people's minds work more or less alike in such things and any one experienced in searching for hidden things knows, most times, just about where to put his hands upon them. She was a clever old bird and knew that about the last place one would look for such a thing would be inside of a violin. She showed consummate cleverness in putting the label out of sight. If she foresaw a rise in the value of violins she also rightly concluded that such would not occur for a great while. She took care to have the violin preserved by willing it in her public will to the one who would receive Le Tre Sorelle. Under such circumstances a repair was not likely. For the rest, she took her chances. It was the only thing she could do. She had to chance some secret way or other. Also there probably were urgent reasons for secrecy beside that given in the

will. Her cleverness and foresight are proved by the outcome."

There was some more conversation and in the course of it we noticed a very old and bent woman come into the area-way from the street, in order to ascend a ruinous stone stairway to gain the orchard where we were. We had seen her several times before and knew she belonged in a house a considerable distance up the hill. We both glanced idly at her, and I returned to my meal.

Suddenly Harry grasped my wrist with a fearful grip and made me spill a glass of wine.

"What the h—"——

"Ssh!—Go on eating! Don't let on!"

The old woman disappeared behind the wall. Presently her head slowly rose above the top of the stairway, followed by her body, and wheezing, she began slowly to ascend the path. In suppressed excitement, Harry watched her disappear among the trees. Then he whispered tensely:—

"Ed, I've got it! Sure!"

"Got what? A fit?"

"The key to the riddle!"

I looked at him, stupified.

"Ed, when that old woman came through the area-way down there, she made a little pause before that one-story part, and bobbed her head and crossed herself!"

With one accord we threw the remains of the lunch into the baskets and hastened there.

We had given this part of the house scant attention hitherto, as we both thought it must have been added long after Albina's time. It seemed newer, was built of better stone and better put together than the main house, and saving the want of a roof was far less ruinous. It con-

tained nothing whatever but an enormous solid stone bench or table at the front end the which we had taken for a device for the household milling of grain, or as designed for some other domestic purpose. We stood in the doorway and gazed at this bench in silence.

"Ed, we have indeed been a pair of jackasses! That is an *altar*. Or was once!"

Harry and I would have sold ourselves very cheaply just then. When we recovered our wits a little we proceeded to give this part a very minute examination from the outside. Now we saw what we should have seen in the first place, namely that the part had been no addition. It was contemporaneous with the older part, for the dovetailing of its stones into the walls of the main house was not of the character that indicated a later addition. It had been better built, and had lasted better; that was all.

Then we went inside and examined the altar. Its every detail indicated that it had been there, absolutely undisturbed, for a vast number of years, although it had certainly been used for other purposes at various times.

This part had, then, been a private chapel where in times of danger, perhaps, the sisters could hear a mass read without risking a journey to a church. In our further examination we found nothing additional save the fact that there had once been a communicating door between the basement of the main house and the chapel. This had been roughly stoned up. We went to the altar again. Harry laid his hand upon it.

"Here is the place! And wisely chosen! For of all places, in a Roman Catholic country, such a one would be the least likely to be disturbed."

After considering the matter further we decided that it was too late, that day, to begin opening it, for it was urgent that, having once fixed upon the right spot, we complete our work in one day if possible, in order not to have to leave the work over night. So we occupied the rest of the afternoon in breaking a passage through the former communicating doorway, in order not to have to pass back and forth by going out of doors, thus keeping our operations unobserved by chance pedestrians or loiterers. So far, we had had no visitors, and we were not desiring company just then.

CHAPTER XIX

DAY was just breaking the morning following when we again set to work. We brought food enough for three days, having determined not to leave the task again until it was finished. We looked strange to each other in white overalls and jackets but neither was in a joking mood.

For some minutes we stood over the altar studying how best to begin. We wished to manage without damaging the altar more than we could help, if for no other reason, at least so we could restore it as nearly as possible to its former condition after we had finished, thus leaving no trace of the operation. But the top slab was in a single piece, and very heavy—a good fifteen inches thick, and about eight by four feet in surface area; furthermore with very little overhang at the edges. Alone, with our simple tools, of course we could not lift that. Nor did the several faces offer more chance. They were paneled, but this paneling was done in the solid stone. The under part of the altar had been chiseled from a solid block, and there seemed to be no joints except that between the base and table.

"Ed, you are better at this sort of thing than I am. Shall we drill a series of holes in a line across one end of the slab and break it?"

"That alone would take all day. Perhaps there is a way in. Albina would not have expected a woman to break or move the stone."

We wasted an hour trying to find a secret entrance. Every panel of the altar rang solid, so

also the floor and walls all round about. Again we bemoaned our lack of knowledge of the customs of those days. Anyone who had lived in Albina's time or near then, would have known the way in, we thought.

"Well, Harry, don't let us waste more time. We must move the stone. We will drive a series of drills under each of the long sides of the top slab for the whole length. Having raised the stone onto the drills we can turn on two of them with wrenches and roll the stone as far over one end as may be necessary to reach the inside. You work on that side and I'll take this."

We inserted the drills, one by one, driving each until it sung a high note when struck, replacing each one that came loose and fell onto the floor. In this way we finally had the series of drills tightly in place on both sides.

"I don't know if we have enough drills. We may have to go to Cattaro and get more."

"Not if we can help it, sonny!" said Harry. "It has been a ticklish enough job to bring the tools we have."

"Well—come on!"

Then began the tedious work of striking one heavy blow upon each drill in line, going back over them again and again. After awhile Harry dropped his hammer.

"Ed, anybody going by can hear this."

"Not to be helped. The only thing to do is to get the pounding done with as soon as we can. If anybody tries to come in we can throw our blouses over the front of the altar, and carry our hammers to the new opening in the wall before letting them in. They will think we are working there."

We struck for another half-hour. Then we

examined the stone and found it was rising on the drills. Harry tried the opened seam with a long straw.

"It is rabbeted," he announced.

"Oh, the devil! Well let us hope the rabbet is shallow. When we get ready to roll it we can cut away enough of the top of the end panel to let the rabbet pass."

We worked on, and after another hour the drills began to lower their note and go easier. Then we continued driving until each drill struck against the rabbeted edge inside.

"That rabbet shows that this has been something more than an altar. Can you see under it from your side, Harry?"

"Yes. The rabbet is above the edge. There is a hollow place under the top.

With a file, we then dressed off the beaten tops of the drills as they stood in place, smoothing the outer ends of the shafts as well. Then we inserted two crowbars under a corner, and sat upon them. This took off enough weight so one of us could reverse the drills along the half of one side, bringing their flat cutting ends outward. After three more such steps all the drills were reversed.

"Now let us square up every drill or it won't roll."

We tapped every drill until it was exactly perpendicular to the face of the altar. Then we rested a few minutes and took some luncheon. Before we resumed work, afterwards, Harry stepped outside and looked about. He returned and reported that no one was in sight.

We examined the interstice on that end toward which we had decided to shunt the stone, and found that the rabbet would pass, having a clear sixteenth

of an inch. We had only left, then, to roll the stone on the drills.

We each placed a wrench upon an end drill and began turning. The stone moved slowly, but without much effort after the first start. But it had to pass eight inches out of place before we could see into the cavity of the altar.

At first we saw nothing but a clean opening; but after moving the tablet six more inches, we could see the beginning of a very narrow, steep and confined flight of steps leading downward, and damp, dank air rose from the opening.

Working with a will, now, we soon had the stone so far shunted that we believed we could enter. We stopped, and, together, looked into the place. Harry remarked:—

"We have been lucky in having moved the stone in the right direction, otherwise it would have bothered us to reach those steps. As it is, I doubt if we can go down there to-day. I don't like the smell of that air."

I lit a match and held it as far inside as I could. It burned as usual.

"The air is all right, Harry, only very damp. I can see the bottom of the steps. There is water down there."

Then I examined the first tiny landing of the stairway immediately inside of the altar.

"And here is the entrance! See this little pair of tracks? This end panel of the side of the altar travels inward! When it is pushed clear in to the farther side, one can squeeze through feet foremost and close it after him. See! This heavy wooden bar just spans the opening. It is rotten now but you can see that it was just the right length. There is the socket for it on the front

side, and there is the slit in the rear side of the panel into which it should fall. It was used to block the opening after the people got in. This place was a refuge—to be used in case the house was taken."

Harry braced his back against the wall and pushed against the panel with his feet. It slid inward;—a child could have done it! We looked at one another and laughed sourly. Getting down on the floor behind the altar, and examining the face of the stone we noticed a small curved hole. Either we had not noticed it before or it had not had any significance for us. It was partly under the bottom piece in the paneling of the altar. It had been inconspicuous in the shadow of the wall when the door was closed. This was, of course, cut for the purpose of inserting a hook in order to bring the door back into place from the outside.

Harry pushed the stone clear in and then poked his head into the opening.

"We'll need candles, Ed. I never thought of that."

"Nor I. We'll have to get them. Anyway, we cannot go down into that damp place until we get well cooled off. There is no use in getting sick. We have plenty of time. We can go down tonight, as well as this afternoon."

"Well, then, let us roll the top slab back into place. We've got the door now, and we can't have somebody come in on us with the top of the altar hanging over the end that way."

"Good. It will take very little time to put it back because we don't have to raise it."

I pushed the secret panel back into place. By reversing some of our previous steps it took only a little over an hour to roll the stone back and

lower it into place. There were some marks of the operation and these we obliterated sufficiently for the present by using the drills to dress off one or two places, and by covering these and others with a little dust and moss. Then, with our blouses, we swept the place into the pile produced by breaking through the communicating door, and deposited some of the tools there.

A little after nine o'clock we were again in the chapel. Harry had made a trip to Cattaro and had brought back a supply of candles and a couple of stout canes, the latter, as he explained, being destined for safeguards against rats or other living creatures we might encounter. Then we donned our working clothes and pairs of old shoes, rolled the legs of our overalls above our knees and prepared to go down. We lit a candle each and Harry pushed the stone clear back.

"Go first, old man! The house is yours!" quoth Harry.

"You are my guest. Apres vous, M'sieur!"

"You're afraid!"

"So are you, my boy."

With a laugh he wriggled feet foremost, into the place. I handed him a package of candles and followed, closing the panel after me. The quarters were very close, but grew a little more roomy further down.

"There is a chain," said Harry. "What was that for?"

It was attached to a ring-bolt at the side of one of the steps. It was rusted through and through and lay in a pile. We looked about and finally spied another ring-bolt bearing a couple of links in the altar table over our heads.

"Ah. That chain was once arranged to prevent the very thing that we did;—that is, lifting the stone."

"Quite right, Harry! Let's get on!"

Arrived at the bottom of the steps, we found the water to be only six inches deep. It lay over a small landing between this and another flight of two steps which led to the right and upward to a very low door-way. Of this the door stood open, and because of the loosening of a hinge, rested against the floor. It had once been very heavy and strong and was barred with iron. The wood was entirely gone in places.

We crawled through the door and found ourselves in a vaulted room in which we could just stand upright under the arch of the vaulting. The centre of the room was supported by a short heavy column which spread out at the top to blend with the vaulting. The masonry was very ancient. In one place near the top of the vaulting was a small opening, and in all the sides round about were crypts in which were coffins or sarcophagi covered with decayed palls. The entire floor space including that occupied by the column was not over twenty-five feet square. I stood under the opening in the ceiling and smelt fresh air.

"That opening probably joins the north chimney," said Harry.

"This place is a tiny catacombs. It was in existence long before the house was built, and has been utilized as a hiding-place in time of need."

"Here is our crucifix!" exclaimed Harry.

We lit several candles and placed them about. Then we examined the crucifix. It was rough-carved in stone, the figure itself being of bronze, and finely done. It was large and stood partly in a

somewhat commodious niche which reached up into the vaulting. Its base was a massive stone.

"It will be here!" said Harry. "Now let us think a little before we do another job of breaking in."

I put my arm about the crucifix and found it would move, although pretty heavy. Harry took hold with me and together we managed to lift it off and stand it on one side. A part of the base came away with it, disclosing a cavity about one and one-half by two feet square.

Within this, and neatly fitting the cavity was a bronze chest with two ring-bolts. We lifted this out without much effort, and lowered it onto the floor. It was a shallow, flat case. Below it was another one of like sort, but our united strength failed to budge it.

"We'd better open them down here, Ed. I'll go up and bring the tools."

"Wait. Albina expected that a woman might find these things. A woman would have to have help to break open these chests. Up to now she has left all very easy."

"Lifting the crucifix, too?" he asked.

"A woman could have overturned it."

"A woman would have to have help in disposing of this treasure after she had found it, Ed."

"Yes—now. Albina did not foresee the present great change in conditions. In those days when a person suddenly grew rich, no questions were asked. They were days of piracy and other secret wealth getting. I think we may find keys, if we search."

"Perhaps she hasen't even locked the boxes."

"Perhaps. There wouldn't be much use in locking them. Here! Take hold!"

I seized the door handle and Harry with me. We each placed a foot upon a corner of the chest. After several heavy jerks it flew open and we both measured our lengths on the pavement. Neither stopped to do any rubbing, but scrambled back to the chest.

Packed snugly inside were twenty-four discolored leathern bags. Opening several at random we found three filled with loose jewels, all of fair size and some very large. Two contained diamonds only, one a collection of precious stones of various sorts. There were sixty-three rubies alone. Most of the bags contained jewels in settings, all of old, and some evidently of very ancient, style.

"You will have to dismount these jewels and melt up the settings," said Harry. "It is a great pity, but there is no help for it. It will be a delicate affair to dispose of so many ancient stones as it is. Don't attempt to do it all at once or in any one place. Take years for it, and do it all over the world. You have time."

Then we turned our attention to the other chest. Being more protected, the door was less glued by the green corrosion and after turning the ring-bolts aside Harry easily pulled it open.

This also contained bags, but all filled with old gold coin of various countries, mostly sequins of the Venetian Republic. This was a deep case and contained two hundred and sixty-seven bags.

We piled the bags on the floor, and by our united strength we lifted the heavy chest out of the cavity, disclosing a third. Upon this lay a folded parchment.

As Harry picked this up, a key fell out of it. He held the parchment near a candle.

"Albina's hand again," he remarked. The writ-

ing was short and he soon read it. It was as follows:—

"The third and last box contains nothing of value. I do not forbid the finder to open it. The key is enclosed in this parchment. When she has once seen for herself what the box contains, I beg her in memory of me to lock the box again, return it to its place, and leave it there forever. Let the key be thrown behind the first sarcophagus to the right of the crucifix, the which coffin contains the dust of one who was far dearer to me than all my heir shall find. Then when my heir shall have removed this treasure which she has already found, I beg, that when she can, she will close this vault, so that its solitude will never more be broken."

"The first coffin to the right," repeated Harry.

"The father of the illegitimate child of course. Her father and husband were buried at Curzola."

"And the once owner of the old violin. And so he rests there! I wonder if he died before her marriage."

"Why—oh, yes. Don't you remember the story of the haidukans?"

"Oh, yes! Of course!"

We lifted out the third box and unlocked it. We raised the lid with a certain reverence.

The chest was shallow like the first one and contained packets of old yellow letters, a diary, a faded handkerchief, a miniature in a carved ivory frame bearing the face of a man seemingly very dark, of fine features, with a wealth of hair tied behind his head. A bit of faded velvet which seemed once to have been the collar of a man's coat; a bit of torn lace; a jeweled locket containing a wisp of black hair; a bit of torn music manuscript yellow and



fragile with age; two little twin bottles of brilliant ruby glass; and a few other such things.

We silently closed and locked the chest and returned it to its place. Then I turned to the first niche to the right of the crucifix intending to throw the key behind the coffin as directed. As I turned I noticed the pall, which was of black velvet, heavily embroidered with almost untarnished gold. The fabric was discolored and stained, but seemingly in better condition than that of the other crypts.

"When she loved the father so well, I wonder she hated their son so," mused Harry.

"I suppose he proved undutiful and untrue. Some of those letters might give light on this and other things now forgotten. We might look them over later. She has not forbidden it."

"Just so! Keep the key for awhile. I fancy, Ed, that after all, her placing the will in the violin was a piece of sentiment. It had been his, and perhaps she had the feeling that she was giving it into his care."

"It may have been."

"Requiescat in pace! Let's get through, Ed! The place is getting on my nerves!"

"Harry, I think I shall leave most of the gold here for the present. The bulk of the treasure is in the jewels. We can get the gold later when I have less on my mind. It has been here undisturbed a hundred and twenty years. We will risk it a little while longer. We would find it difficult to carry it away now."

"When you come again, you must come prepared to melt it and cast it into bars. Then it can be sold safely. You'll have to abandon medicine and set up as a wholesale jewel merchant."

"Not a bad suggestion. I'll consider it."

We replaced most of the gold in its chest after first returning the latter to its former place. We kept out several bags. Then the empty upper chest was replaced and we returned the crucifix to position. We moved the rest of the treasure upstairs, flung our tools and working clothes onto the stairway under the altar and re-closed the secret door. We then packed the treasure into our lunch baskets. After this we lay ourselves upon benches and slept dreamlessly until the sun was high.

CHAPTER XX

ABOUT three months after our success described in the last chapter, Gisela was unveiled and set free. She had received the news before I did, and when I drove to the convent, the Sister Superior did not keep me waiting long, but left me and sent her in.

As I waited with my heart full and scarcely able to breathe, I heard a door *open*, this time, and turned to meet a beautiful flying figure which rushed into my arms. Neither of us could speak for a while. Then when I could, I asked once more the same old question—and had my own answer, at last.

"Dear heart, *of course* we shall be married! Have I not loved you always? But," and she smiled half sadly, "you will have to wait until I have my hair again, dear. I have not been tonsured for nearly six weeks—I did not know why, until yesterday—but it is still dreadful."

"It need not be the full length, my love. We will let it grow a little longer and then I want to watch it myself and see to it that it does it just right."

"If you watch it, Eduard, I am sure it will be prettier than it ever was before. Oh—how I *love* you, Eduard! *How—I—love you,* tesoro mio!"

As I write, it is May of the following year. For more than eight months Gisela has been the daughter of the Count's house. She openly accuses the

Count of making love to her every day, and the Count laughs delightedly at the notion.

"Never mind, Edward. Between us, Gisela and I can keep him straight while he is in the house," asserts the Gräfin.

Her hair is not long enough to do up yet, but she says that with "help" she hopes to look presentable at our wedding in September. She has not explained what this "help" is and I have not inquired.

I have succeeded in converting much of the treasure into cash but the selling of the whole will take time. I do not know the value of it yet, for it is going far beyond my expectations, as every single gem in the collection has proven to be of the best quality, and many of them great rarities. When Gisela was informed of the probable value of what she had, she held up her hands in amazement and unbelief. Then she pressed me to take it all;—she did not wish to hear more of it, she said. But I only accepted the return of my entire outlay in her behalf. That was a bagatelle when compared to the whole.

Harry also received his treasure; not merely as a loan, but as a gift from both of us. When he was informed that henceforth the violin was his very own, he took Gisela's hand, bent and kissed it reverently, and told her that henceforth she was his Goddess enshrined above all other women. When he had finished this speech, I whispered in his ear:

"Little dago with two eyes and two ideas!"

"Jackass!" he whispered back.

"Which of us do you mean, Harry?"

But he deigned no reply to this.

I heard him play on the violin at a concert in Brussels last winter. It sang out with a glorious

noble voice, filling the auditorium with a paean which seemed to sing of work well done and of a joyous release, just tinged with a certain shadowy something that may have been the lingering affectionate memory of another long-departed hand. But it will forget that other hand in time; for Harry loves it like he will never love a woman, and such a love must beget its return.

Cecilie, too, has succeeded. She is not the great artist that Lubitza was, sweeping upon the public like a blazing star; but "die Narishkina" has attained a good position in the operatic world, is advancing steadily in her work, is happy in it, and asks no more.

But none of us is happier than the old woman Teresa; for she is with her mistress again and will remain with her for the rest of her life.

I hear that the Ingenieur has been promoted again and if nothing happens to him that he will, one day, occupy a high place in the army. I have further heard that he is to marry a certain Fräulein Bauer from whose father he will receive a heavy dot. However, I do not envy him. Besides, I cannot help but believe that a shadowy hand is hovering over his head, and that in its own good time it will descend and drag him down, perhaps upon the very threshold of his highest success, as it did his former fiancée.

I have never seen Signor Tomanovich or his son Paulo since my trial. Neither came in my sight during the visit of last year at Cattaro or during two subsequent ones that Harry and I made in order to remove the gold, and to carry out old Albina's last wish.

Bright, pretty Amalia Sbutega is now a very rich girl—richer, even, than Gisela. She wrote

Gisela not long ago that she was looking for a husband now, and Gisela suggested that I go down to Cattaro and offer myself. I answered that I felt bound in honor to *her* now, and didn't feel that it would be doing right.

Le Tre Sorelle still exists, somber and grim as ever. Last spring after Harry and I had removed the last of the gold, we had workmen come, brick up the door into the catacombs, and fill the stairway and the altar with earth and stones. Then we replaced the upper tablet of the altar, to remain. This was done in obedience to old Albina's last request.

I never expect to revisit the house. It will stand for years to come, a tomb, enshrining the dust which Albina had loved so well, together with those little things in the third casket under the crucifix which she so reverently had deposited there.

THE END.

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